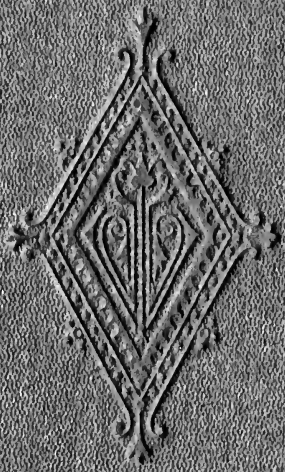

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SHALL I WIN HER?

The Story of a Wanderer.

By JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'UNDER THE RED DRAGON,'
FAIRER THAN A FAIRY,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SHALL I WIN HER?

CHAPTER I.

The supercilious Carysfort was disposed to treat rather contemptuously my fears of collusion between my fugitive servant and the outlaw. He thought that hostility to myself, and robbery on the part of Africander, were all they had in view. Even the references to the Cape Riflemen he laughed at; but Douglas shared my fears that something was impending, for Mark was the leader of a gang of desperadoes and escaped convicts, all wretches of the worst description.

The fourth day of our enforced halt had drawn to a close. The rain had ceased, but the hot haze rendered our marching as yet almost impossible, so the start was to be made

on the morrow, for Carysfort's impatience to get forward was now becoming pretty perceptible.

Clarice had very calmly and deliberately set before him the necessity for taking her sister back, even to Cape Town, possibly, vaguely hinting about Fanny's annoyance at meeting Douglas — Carysfort winced at the name—and the danger accruing to both sisters in the immediate vicinity of a war with savages; and with cold reluctance he consented to their having the Cape escort to some safe place in the rear, where Fanny was to await his return, or the progress of events.

I had my own doubts and fears of the escort, but as we should draw further from Caffre influences in our southern journey, the fellows might prove trusty after all. Yet to make 'assurance doubly sure,' I had it finally arranged that we should be accompanied back as far as Graham's Town by Speke van Bommel, his son Hans, and four paid boors, all well armed and mounted.

Even when consenting to our arrangements, Carysfort could not conceal his dislike for me.

'I am, as the saying is, "a soldier, and nothing but a soldier—all pipeclay and discipline,"' said he; 'and I don't quite understand this Mr. Richard Haddon—for such his name appears to be now—or his interference in our affairs.'

'Carysfort,' replied Clarice reproachfully, and colouring painfully the while, 'have not Captain Douglas, Mr. Haddon himself, and I explained all to you?'

'I don't understand him, I repeat, and don't care if I never do.'

'Please, Carysfort, speak kindly,' she urged gently.

'But I yield to your wishes, Miss Haywood, in this matter.'

'For that I thank you.'

'And Fanny may go; it is wiser in more respects than one.'

This one 'respect' was, doubtless, the presence of Douglas in camp.

I had completed my arrangements for our return by the very route we had been, so far, pursuing. A trusty knecht of Van Bommel's was to have charge of the waggon and team. The sisters were to have their saddle horses to

ride when they chose, and were to be accompanied by other native female attendants. I had procured fresh rifles and ammunition, in case such should be wanted, for we never knew what a day might bring forth ; and, to conciliate the Cape escort, by my intercession, the two mutinous privates, Jan Cupido and Zwart Hendrick, were released by Carysfort from the guard-house; and now, having, as I thought, settled everything, I found myself alone with my pipe in the beautiful garden of Van Bommel's mansion.

I knew not how it was, but on this night, amid all the joys of my new position, a presentiment of approaching evil hung over me like a cloud.

Yet I could hear Graves laughing heedlessly with Fanny, and Clarice singing and accompanying herself on the stringy piano of the dead Gertrude van Bommel. It was 'Remembrance' she was singing once more, and the words, with the sweet cadence of her voice, made my heart thrill within me.

I could linger from her side no longer, and was turning to rejoin her, when the sharp report of three musket shots in quick succession,

and a sudden glare of light that broke upon the sky at a little distance, made me pause in doubt and alarm.

With true military instinct and alacrity, Carysfort, Douglas, and then Graves, came hurrying out to learn 'what the doocid row was,' as the latter said; and at that moment Sergeant Burns, in his blue blouse and tartan trews, came rushing towards the house with his rifle in his hand, and his belts half buckled on—in fact, he had been accoutring himself as he ran along the street.

'Major Carysfort!' he exclaimed breathlessly, 'the Caffres are upon us, sir; they are attacking a large house at the end of the village, and killing all that come in their way!'

'In what direction is the attack?' asked Carysfort, unmoved.

'Where you see the light, sir; on the road to the bridge.'

'Are the quarter-guard under arms?' asked Douglas.

'Yes, sir; and falling back this way under Corporal Wallace.'

'Get the piper. The gathering will sound here, and here shall the men muster and fall in.'

'Graves, get the Cape escort mounted instantly,' cried Carysfort, as the sergeant vanished to execute the orders given to him, and we turned to get our arms and to leave the ladies in tears and terror.

Fanny at first made light of the affair, and was piqued by the frigid kiss of Carysfort, whose bearing was grave, but without any tone of tenderness.

'Come, major,' said she, looking rather frightened nevertheless, 'this is all bosh, I hope. Remember, at least, that I have a soul above hysterics and sal volatile.'

'It is no "bosh," as you improperly term it, Mrs. Carysfort. The village is attacked by insurgent Caffres—you may hear their yells even here,' replied the major. 'Mynheer van Bommel, will you have the kindness to get the ladies' horses saddled instantly, that we may be prepared for any emergency?'

The stately staff officer was as cool as a cucumber.

I hung my revolver at my girdle, loaded a double-barrelled rifle, and bestowing a brief but agonising embrace on Clarice, was hurried away by Douglas, whose farewell glance at

Fanny was a sad and wistful one, while Carysfort lingered till he could see the Cape escort of mounted riflemen posted about the house of Van Bommel to protect it and its inmates.

In front of it Douglas's Highlanders were already under arms, while Mac Gillivray was blowing the last notes of the regimental summons, 'The Gathering of the Macleods,' the same wild air that many a time and oft has called to battle the men of Lewis, Skye, and many a Hebridean isle.

'Open your pouches. With ball cartridge; load—cap!'

The orders followed each other rapidly, and just as the Hottentots of the Rifle Corps appeared in their saddles in front of the house, we moved off at the double towards where the flames from a large thatched house—a species of kraal—outside the village were reddening the sky of a somewhat cloudy and gloomy night.

The enemy had not, as yet, broken into the village; but we could learn, from the terrified crowd of people who passed to our rear, many bearing their most valued goods, that

the Caffres had attacked, pillaged, and set on fire the house of the wealthy boor, Piet van der Meulen.

Scarcely had we been gone ten minutes, when—as we afterwards learned—a man presented himself at the door of Speke van Bommel's mansion—a tall, powerful, and swinging-like fellow, armed with musket, knife, and pistols.

His general appearance and bearing were so unprepossessing that the mynheer called upon the soldiers of the Cape corps to prevent his entrance; but Privates Jan Cupido and Zwart Hendrick, who were posted near the door, grinned from their saddles, but never moved a muscle otherwise.

The stranger, with an oath, tumbled Van Bommel aside, and entered the house, saying that he insisted on seeing Major Carysfort.

The latter, who had just buckled on his sword, and was in the act of loading his revolver, looked up on hearing his name, and saw at the door of the dining-room a tall, bronzed fellow, in a species of half-colonial, half-Caffre costume, with a kaross on his

shoulder, well armed, and having a strange, uncouth, and livid streak or scar across an unusually fierce and repulsive visage.

It was like a dream to Carysfort that he had heard before of such a face and such a scar; but it was not until too late that he remembered the printed police descriptions of the famous bushranger, Mark Graaff.

'Well, sir,' said the major haughtily, 'who are you that enter thus unannounced, and what do you want?'

'A moment's speech with you, Major Carysfort,' replied the other, almost abashed by the perfect coolness of his questioner.

'Speak quickly, if you please. I have no time to spare.'

'Nor have I, for I have been sent here by Captain Douglas, to tell you that the attacking party are in such force that it will be impossible to hold the village against them.'

'Force! The deuce they are.'

'Yes, and that you had better get the ladies mounted and away at once.'

'Did not Douglas say in what direction the ladies were to go?'

'Anywhere,' replied the other impatiently.

'Anywhere, so that you get them quietly out of this. I'll guide you.'

'There is no deception in this?' said Carysfort suspiciously, and eyeing the speaker sharply, for it did occur to him as strange that Douglas should have sent his message by any one who was not a soldier.

'None, sir.'

'Who are you?'

'My name matters little to you,' was the sulky response.

'Then what are you?'

'A trek-boor.'

'You look and speak like an Englishman.'

'Appearances are often deceptive,' said the other, in whose eyes a dangerous expression was beginning to gather. 'Hark! Do you hear how heavy the firing is?'

Clarice and Fanny had hastily donned their riding-habits, and Van Bommel's grooms had brought all the horses saddled to the door, so both were speedily mounted, and both looked pale and greatly agitated.

The lurid glare of the burning house now lit up the windows of the pretty village, and threw the shadows of the giant mimosas and

lemon trees far along the little street. It tipped with red light the glittering rifle barrels of the Cape escort. Even their shining black cheekbones, white eyeballs, and glistening teeth were all distinctly visible in the fiery blaze; while amid the crackling of the flames, as roof, rafters, and chimneys went thundering down into it, could be heard the shrill, wild, and demon-like yells of the Caffres, and the sharp, ringing rifle-shots of the 74th Highlanders, as they advanced at the double to attack the enemy with their wonted pluck.

But now a sudden and wailing cry escaped both sisters, when they saw poor Carysfort, when in the act of mounting his horse, struck savagely to the earth by the clubbed musket of the sham messenger, who was no other than Mark Sharkeigh, and whose ready hands speedily appropriated the watch, purse, and rings of his victim.

Then one or two rifle-shots were discharged at the body of the major by the rascals of the Cape escort, who, throwing aside all disguise, now proceeded to ransack and pillage the house of Speke van Bommel.

CHAPTER II.

Was the solemn presentiment of coming evil that fell upon me about to be realised in some form after all?

It would almost seem so now.

We rapidly drew near the scene of the outrage, and forming the men in rank entire, and by throwing forward the right flank of the party at an angle, while lining the dense hedge of prickly pear which enclosed the kraal of Piet van der Meulen, Douglas was enabled to enfilade the insurgents, thieves, or whatever they were, and for a few moments the scene was alike startling and impressive to us all.

The courtyard and garden of the kraal were strewed with broken furniture, dishes, plates, and other household utensils, amid which lay the bodies of Piet van der Meulen, a bald and corpulent man, and some of his family, most horribly mutilated.

From the gaping walls—for the roof had fallen in—from the open doors and shattered windows rushed torrents of yellow flame, against which the strange figures of the Caffres and others—some fifty or so, in all—were seen in dark and distinct outline.

All were maddened and drunk by hemp-seed smoked through water in bullock horns, and as their lithe, active, and wiry, but fiend-like figures, dancing with frantic gestures and yells, were seen in strong and dark relief against the mass of flaming light beyond, they presented a spectacle worthy of the graphic pencil of Gustave Doré.

Among them we could see many who were not Caffres, and whose dress proclaimed them to be Tronkvolk—Dutch, even English fugitive convicts, who had fraternised with the Caffres, and intermarried among them—wretches steeped to the lips in atrocity and crime, more hardened in cruelty then the savages with whom they consorted, and against these renegade Europeans the vengeance of the Highlanders was specially directed.

'Here are scenery and costume, by Jove!' exclaimed Graves, who, a Dundreary though

he was, showed that he did not want pluck now; 'a jolly—aw, aw—lot of chromo-lithographic-looking beggars these Caffres are.'

All this scene and these details we saw for a moment only, for the next instant, and just as the Caffres were about to fire another house, from whence the inmates had fled, a wreath of white smoke obscured all, as the Highlanders opened a fire upon them from two points, at sixty yards' range, knocking them down like ninepins.

Now the yells rang on the night wind more shrilly than ever. I selected one powerful Caffre, and covered him with both barrels; but the contents of one served my purpose. He was deliberately mangling the body of a child which he was dragging about in its white nightdress, just as the poor little thing had been torn from its peaceful crib, or perhaps from its shrieking mother's arms.

My bullet pierced his brain. He sprang convulsively nearly three feet from the ground, and then fell dead. As he tumbled prone on his face, with hands outspread, a new and terrible emotion came over me, and I felt a wilder and fiercer excitement than before. Yet this

was not the first man I had shot, for long ere this I had been in many a running skirmish with outlawed Bushmen and plundering Amaponda Caffres.

A bullet or two fired by the Tronkvolk whistled harmlessly past us; two or three assegais, launched vengefully, but at random, whizzed through the prickly pear hedge, and stuck in the turf beyond, with their iron heads downward, and their reedy shafts quivering, yet none of us were hit, and almost ere we could reload the whole rabble took to flight, and retired with wonderful speed and activity along the highway towards the hills.

By Douglas's orders, the Highlanders pursued them as they scurried away, loading and firing after them as well as they were able at random and in the darkness. We had followed the savages in this manner for about half a mile, when a halt was called by Douglas, who, taking into consideration the small number of the attacking force, and the peculiar suddenness with which they had decamped, began to fear that by pursuing them farther we might be drawn into some well-prepared ambush and all destroyed. Moreover, he was acting upon

his own responsibility, for Carysfort, his senior officer, to the surprise of us all, had not appeared on the ground as yet.

Whether such a snare was prepared for us or not, we never learned; but we were soon assured of one thing—that the attack on the remote house of Van der Meulen was but a feint to cover a deeper purpose.

'There is something up in our rear, sir,' cried Sergeant Burns, as we were preparing to fall back.

'Another house on fire, I perceive,' said Douglas.

'Yes,' added I; 'and, by heaven, Gerard, it is the house of Speke van Bommel!'

Apprehending we knew not what, we returned to the village in greater haste than we had quitted it, to find that the handsome and snug dwelling of our hospitable Dutch friend was a mass of roaring flame, amid which nearly all his goods and chattels perished, for fire-engines were unknown in that remote region of the British empire.

Stretched on the ground, not far from the door, surrounded by a crowd of wondering and pitying boors, lay Major Carysfort, co-

vered with blood, and to all appearance dead.

There rushed through the mind of Douglas a strange tumult of mingled thoughts.

'What new horror is this?' he exclaimed, as he knelt beside the body of his successful rival. 'Carysfort dying! How shall I break this to poor Fanny? Shall I, of all men, break it at all, or you, Haddon? How will she receive it?'

Douglas felt the major's pulse. How often during his career of service and bloodshed had he done this to a comrade's wrist, calculating by the ebb of the life-current how long they might be spared to each other.

'Thank heaven, he still lives!' exclaimed Douglas, thrusting aside any ungenerous thought. 'But, poor souls, this is a terrible commemoration of your wedding day.'

Douglas was truly worthy of the name he bore, and the grand old line from whence he came—the 'Douglases, tender and true,' of the old Scottish warlike times. He had their proverbially dark eyes and somewhat swarthy skin, which they inherited from Sholto Dhu

Glas, the dark-haired man of the old Hebridean battle field.

But we were now to learn the most terrible calamity of the night from the lips of the pale and bewildered Van Bommel, for on looking about for the ladies, the honest Dutchman, while wringing his hands with tears in his eyes, informed us that 'they had been carried off by the Cape Mounted Riflemen, who had mutinied, plundered his house, set it on fire, and joined Mark Graaff, under whose ruffianly hands the major had fallen.'

Now, to our distress and utter dismay, we saw the snare into which we had been drawn.

The attack had been confined to the remote house of Piet van der Meulen simply to lure us from guarding that of Van Bommel, for doubtless Mark Sharkeigh had been duly informed of all our arrangements by that treacherous scoundrel, Adrian Africander, against whom I registered in my terrified heart a stern vow for vengeance.

But what availed it then?

Oh, bitterness supreme! For some time the information of this new catastrophe stun-

ned and bewildered me. It was like a sudden death—it was something beyond the power of conviction or of realisation; so much so that every moment I expected her to appear before me.

'Oh, horror, horror!' groaned Douglas, letting his claymore drop on the ground, while covering his face with his hands, and trembling as if with ague.

To think of those girls, so delicately and tenderly nurtured, so gentle and highly accomplished, pure and highminded English girls—of Clarice, who to me was the embodiment of all that was lovable and lovely in life—being in such hands was agonising and maddening.

Instant pursuit was, of course, our first idea; but we were afoot, while the abductors were all well mounted on fresh troop horses, which had rested during a four days' halt, and Sharkeigh had appropriated to himself the fine charger of Major Carysfort, who, too probably, would never sit in a saddle more.

'In what direction have they gone?' asked twenty voices.

Some said one way, and some said another;

but I had not a doubt they would make their way north-eastward to the hills.

A dying bushman, one of the Tronkvolk, left behind his fellows with a bullet in his chest, affirmed that Mark Graaff—he knew not his other name—was the abductor and originator of the whole scheme.

'In what direction has he taken them?' I asked.

He writhed round in his dying agony to indicate, for his voice was gone; but whatever was his meaning, he pointed skyward—a motion of which we could make nothing.

The Highlanders, impulsive, ardent, and enthusiastic, were impatient to be off after them. They threw aside their greatcoats and blankets, and all that might impede their advance; and again, at a rapid double, we marched in pursuit, heedless whether we fell into an ambush or not.

Indeed, we had ceased to care for it, or to think of it, as the object of Sharkeigh had too evidently been the abduction of Mrs. Carysfort and her sister. But what was his motive? Revenge on me, simply outrage, or the hope of ransom? Perhaps all these motives together.

As we went on breathlessly and in silence, I felt so benumbed at heart, and so crushed in soul, that tears melted me, and I began to recall the childish prayers my dead mother had taught me long ago, when nightly I had folded my little hands and knelt at her knee; but prayer afforded me no relief, my heart was full of desperate thoughts of rescue and revenge.

Gone! Clarice was gone! torn from me now, and too probably for what a terrible fate! I might never even see her dead remains, or know where, or when, or how she found a grave.

At that very moment what might she and her sister be enduring! My sweet Clarice! How I repented me now of my past silly suspicions of Graves, and the days of my absurd incognito; the reunion delayed, the kisses I had lost — those wonderful magnetic kisses, that from her lips had gone straight to my heart, never, never to be forgotten.

Where were now our schemes of marriage, our hopes for the blissful future? Of what avail were the wealth, the gold and diamonds I had amassed during five years of exile, toil,

and peril? All valueless to me now as dross—as the sandy dust of Kalihari or the bubbles on the current of the Keiskamma.

'Of all equalisers there is none like misery.' And now Gerard Douglas, in his sorrow for another man's wife, was enduring nearly all that I did for the loss of her I had already deemed my own.

Yet on our departure, and while I was prosecuting inquiries as to the track we were to follow, he, like a good and generous fellow, had bound up and tenderly dressed the wound on the head of Carysfort, whom we left in a state of semi-insensibility to the care of the kind Dutch villagers. His head alone was injured. Luckily, the bullets fired at him by the malcontent Hottentot mutineers had only cut and torn his undress uniform, and sunk into the earth.

In the pursuit we were joined by young Hans van Bommel, and several other active young boors, all well armed, and full of vengeance for the wrong inflicted on the village. Some of them had cutlasses and pistols, and all carried long single-barrelled guns with great flint locks, and each had a powder flask

of bullock's horn, dangling at a tasselled cord over his left shoulder and under the right arm, for priming readily.

They were all lithe young fellows, though pure Dutchmen, and were well used to forest life, and to hunting the wild boar and porcupine in the bright moonlight nights, when with dog, bayonet, and spear, they would bring their savage quarry to bay in the deep dark kloofs of the Zum Bergen, and other mountain ranges.

One or two dead or dying Caffres whom we found on the way, here and there a broken assegai, or a warlike crane's feather, and so forth, indicated that we were pursuing the right direction, though we might be far—alas, too far—from those we followed.

The moist state of the road and turf after the recent days of rain, showed us the hoof marks of the Cape escort, who had made a *détour* of a few miles round the village; and after pursuing the common highway for a little distance, had, as I supposed correctly, wheeled off in a north-west direction towards the mountains of British Caffraria.

Even in the starlight the boors and I could

track them; but when day broke the traces, to our sorrow, disappeared, and when the sun arose we found ourselves all but lost in a dense, wild forest, where the only paths were those formed long, long ago by the great feet of the roving elephants, under noble trees of vast size and wonderful beauty, where the mimosa, the willow, and the white thorn mingled, the rich blossoms of the latter loading the air with perfume; and where the black karon, the bustard, the grevil, and the partridge flew before us in noisy coveys and flights. And then at times, too, the springbok, black-horned and white-faced, galloped past us in startled herds, but all unheeded now.

Alas, it was not game we looked for there!

In a part of this wood Sergeant Robert Burns found, to our horror, some human remains lying among the long, rank grass. They were those of a person, or persons, quite recently torn by wild animals.

The sex was undistinguishable to unprofessional eyes; but some rags of female attire that fluttered near filled Douglas and me with sickening terror and dismay.

Round the place where the Highlanders had halted and piled arms for a time, the boors and I made a circuit, and soon struck upon the trail again — the hoof marks, the crushed grass, and broken twigs.

At one place under a willow tree, a kid glove, a veil, or a piece thereof, and a gold bracelet, all lying together, and which we recognised as belonging to Fanny, made us tremble lest some violence had been offered to her there.

On we went, inspired with renewed hope and fury; but long ere we halted, weary and worn, breathless and utterly exhausted, on the western bank of the great Keiskamma River, all traces of those we pursued were lost to us for ever.

CHAPTER III.

Despite the skill and exertions of Hans van Bommel, his brother boors, and myself, no further track or trace could be discovered. An entire day we lingered on the western bank of the Keiskamma River, searching, but in vain.

A long, sorrowful, and agonising conference ensued between Douglas and me, and we came at last to the grim and bitter conclusion that there was nothing for us left now but to commit those we loved to the providence of heaven, while we pushed on to head-quarters and joined the troops in the field. Indeed, Douglas's strict line of duty required him to do so imperatively, as he had been wandering too long with his detachment already, but chiefly in consequence of his guide, the Cape Rifleman, having misled him.

If the boors would have accompanied me, I was not disinclined to have ventured into

the bush, in search of intelligence; but they shrunk from a task so perilous, so I now resumed my former plan of accompanying Douglas, and joining the field force as a volunteer, inspired only by the emotions of desperation and revenge.

'If, by the general's permission, a flag of truce were sent to Sandilli, to inquire into the fate of the two captives, I would gladly be its bearer, and for such a duty none could be better fitted than I.'

'But a flag of truce to such utter savages!' urged Douglas.

'True, true,' said I bitterly.

It did seem a hopeless errand, certainly; but I thought much might be achieved by one accustomed to five years' wandering in the land of the boors, and even far beyond its dangerous frontier.

If the sisters were surviving even when that attempt was made, what might they not have endured from toil, privation, heat, and exposure? Fever was, perhaps, the smallest human ill; but, more than all, what might they not have suffered at the hands of such men as those who possessed them?

It seemed but as last night since Douglas and I met so strangely and, for me, so opportunely, in Hell's Kloof; but long ages seemed to have elapsed since Clarice had been torn from me—since I last looked upon her face and heard her voice—yet barely twenty-four hours had elapsed.

All was chaos, all confusion, in my mind; but we never ceased to deplore the jealous folly of Carysfort in bringing his wife to the front at such a perilous time, and thus causing the too probable destruction of her and her innocent sister.

The Dutch boors, who had accompanied us thus far, now bade us adieu, and we resumed our route towards the army.

On the third day of our march we entered the Ecca Pass, 'the terror of waggon-drivers and post-riders, and notorious as the scene of many fatal ambuscades.'

There the road winds along a narrow kloof, between steep and lofty hills, covered with dense thorn bushes. On one side, high rocks ascend, perpendicular as a wall; on the other yawns a profound abyss. Many an unsuspecting traveller, trader, and trek-boor,

and even many an armed escort, have perished there, shot down helplessly from chasms and crevices in the unapproachable cliffs.

Boulders and fallen masses of rock encumbered the way, and what were more obnoxious still, heaps of whitening bones, and shrunken or sun-dried skins, the remains of cattle that had perished of thirst. Here and there, foully tainting the air, lay the carcasses of half-devoured horses, from which the gorged vultures arose in angry flights as we drew near them. Nor were one or two human skeletons wanting to complete the striking picture, for within a month a mounted express party had all been waylaid there, and murdered by Sandilli and his men.

But all was lonely and quiet as we threaded the formidable pass, and nothing was stirring there but the dossies, little animals of the rabbit species, with rats' heads and apes' hands, which skipped from bush to rock.

Ere long we heard the welcome sound of drums, and on turning an angle of the perilous road, where it went acutely round a projecting and overhanging mass of rock, an exclamation simultaneously escaped us all, when

we came suddenly in sight of the whole field force of General Somerset, the long columns of infantry marching by sections, with bayonets fixed and colours cased; the cavalry with all their appointments glittering; the wild-looking Fingo and Bechuana levies, with musket, assegais, and horn; the waggons with their smoking teams; the cannon, pack-horses, and so forth, winding far along the hillside, through the brilliantly coloured bush, the greenness of which was varied by beautiful euphorbias as large as the greatest forest trees.

The troops were in advance of us by several miles, and it was not until evening fell, when, after quitting the Ecca Pass by a steep, rough road, we overtook them while halting near Fort Browne, a lonely quadrangular fortification, which stands close to the Great Fish River, and overlooks a sandy and barren district studded with wild thorn bushes.

The native levies were the first we passed —Fingoes, who are a tribe darker in skin and distinct from the Caffres, who keep them in a state of slavery; and next the Bechuanas, with whom we were in alliance, and natives

divided into many tribes, each clan, like those of the Scottish Highlanders, having its own hereditary chief. Frank and sociable fellows are those dusky Bechuanas, but exceedingly tenacious of their national customs.

All the savages were led by British officers, whose duty was certainly not to be envied, as they were incessantly fighting among themselves, and using their knobkerries, or war-clubs, on each other's woolly pates without mercy.

After passing their wild and disorderly camp, we were received with some little interest as we marched past the lines of the Cape Rifles and Caffre police, and then through those of the 6th Royal Warwickshire, 73d Perthshire, and the 91st Argyleshire, to where the 74th Highlanders were posted, and then to Lieutenant-Colonel Fordyce. Douglas made a report of his march, of his having been misled, his being joined by Major Carysfort, and of the disastrous affair of the village.

'You but confirm a rumour of a very unpleasant nature,' said the colonel, a pleasant and gentlemanly officer, who fell in action

soon after; 'a Hottentot deserter from the Cape Mounted Rifles was taken yesterday by the Caffre police, to whom he gave information that two white ladies—Europeans—were in the hands of Sandilli, into whose camp they had been brought in a very exhausted state by the followers of Mark Graaff.'

'Oh, heavens!' said I. 'And the camp of Sandilli—'

'Is in the rear of his position—the Amatola mountains,' resumed the colonel; 'but nothing more could we learn, for the Caffre police, who are somewhat rapid in their measures, had the fellow shot and buried in less than five minutes.'

The scarlet uniforms of the four British regiments had all been relinquished for dark blouses of canvas, and for service in the bush they had been supplied with feldt-schoen, as worn by the colonists, broad leather peaks to their forage caps, and light pouches of untanned leather.

'Allow me, colonel, to introduce an old friend of mine—Mr. Haddon, late of the —th Fusiliers,' said Douglas, leading me forward. 'He is anxious to serve with us as a volun-

teer, and being celebrated as a hunter and bushranger, he will prove a useful addition to our ranks.'

The colonel held out his hand, and bade me welcome, saying, I 'might attach myself to Douglas's company at once.'

His detachment of soldiers now joined their various companies. Gerard found himself free, and a crowd of officers belonging to the 74th and 91st Highlanders gathered around him, and all, unaware of the anxiety in which we were plunged, poured forth a torrent of thoughtless questions.

'Welcome back to headquarters, Douglas,' said Bonteine, of the 74th, a gay-looking young officer; 'though we have something brisker to do now than shooting quails, and practising to toss the assegai, *à la* Caffre.'

'So you have come to take pot luck with us at last,' said another, 'and had some fighting on the way up from the rear, it seems?'

'Yes, at Hell's Kloof, where I saved my friend from Mark Graaff, and a night or two after in a valley where he potted some of my sentries.'

'And how about *la belle* Carysfort—the

golden-haired Fanny, who is such a contrast to her graver sister?' resumed Bonteine. 'As usual, I suppose, flirting furiously with the captain, and mingling her sighs with the staff. By Jove, that girl gets well through her time!'

If a glance could have slain, the dark eyes of Douglas would have slain the heedless subaltern.

'Hush, for heaven's sake, Bonteine,' said he. 'You know not what you say.'

'How so, Gerard?' 'Why?' 'What the deuce is up?' asked three others.

'Bolted—eh? With whom?' asked Bonteine.

'Silence, Jack,' said Douglas angrily. 'She, and her sister, too, are prisoners in the hands of the Caffres, if they are alive, and even if so, heaven help them, poor things, heaven help them!'

'In the hands of the Caffres?' exclaimed all together, while the varying of their voices and the changed expression of their faces evinced the deep interest, astonishment, and commiseration with which these tidings were heard.

Douglas and I narrated all that had taken place, and though Carysfort was universally condemned for his rashness and folly in bringing ladies even so far to the front as Graham's Town, the greatest compassion and sympathy were expressed for the too probable fate of Clarice Haywood and her sister.

My idea of a flag of truce I found to be universally condemned as being rash, wild, and beyond the comprehension of the Caffres, who it was averred would inevitably destroy any one approaching their lines under any flag whatever; so we could but hope that when we attacked them, and stormed the Amatolas, some trace might be had of the unhappy girls who were in their hands; but as if to add to the poignancy of my fear and sorrow, I could gather from the remarks freely made around me that the chances of their even being permitted to live were slender indeed.

The officers of the 74th now proposed to have some refreshment after their long march through the Ecca Pass. Their servants produced some boiled coffee, with ration beef and black biscuits, after which a small cask of

very fine madeira, which Bonteine had found in a deserted kraal, was set abroach, and Douglas's comrades—and mine, as I now deemed them—resolved 'to make a night of it.'

Soldierlike, they soon dismissed all recollection of the subject which weighed so heavy on my soul in the merriment and barrack room 'chaff' that ensued on the 'co-equal delights of women, wine, and tobacco.'

Jack Bonteine in particular was noisy and heedless, for although a Scotsman in blood and name, he had very little of the Scot in his temperament or bearing.

'You have seen much of the world, I presume,' said I, after some remark of his.

'By jingo, I should think so—India, China, Canada—all that an officer can see; but it's all bosh—there's nothing in it,' replied the heedless fellow. 'It has taught me one thing, however.'

'And that is?'

'Ability to digest such tough ration beef as this, and such ammunition bread, without the aid of any pills.'

'A few months ago, when at Cork, we had little thought of being here, Mr. Haddon,'

said Archy Campbell, a tall and fair-haired 74th man. 'Supposed we were for Old Gib or Hull.'

'And so you came by Graham's Town, Gerard?'

'Of course, Bonteine.'

'Did you look up any of the fellows in Fort England?'

'No.'

'Too busy among the fräuleins, with their thick ankles and yellow hair—eh?'

'You are wrong, Archy,' said Douglas gravely. 'I had something else to think of.'

'By Jove, you have come back to us quite sulky, Gerard!' persisted Bonteine. 'What's up with you? Are some swell friends telegraphing to the Horse Guards in your favour—or what?'

'I have had thoughts of my own, Jack—thoughts in which you cannot share—to make me sad enough.'

'Oh, in that case, I beg pardon,' said Bonteine. 'You have been at Malta, I suppose?' he added, turning to me. 'I remember your regiment lying there with ours.'

'And so do I,' interposed a smart little

ensign, before I could speak. 'The tiny, black-eyed women are pretty there, and wear their black lace faldettas most becomingly. Their husbands, though hospitable enough, are not very accommodating. However, the signoras know enough of the Queen's English to understand the language of—shall we call it love?—yes—or flowers.'

'Here's a little reprobate fresh from school,' said the doctor of the corps, with a severity that was not all mockery.

'You are right to—aw—aw—snub him, Doctor Fawbs,' lisped Graves.

'You be hanged, sir,' said the doctor, turning bluntly to the startled Guardsman. 'My name is Forbes, and I'll allow no Scotchman in his snobbery, or Englishman in his ignorance, to caricature it.'

Graves, astonished by the Scotchman's caustic temper, raised his eyebrows superciliously, and shrugged his shoulders.

And as the evening passed on, and the abduction of those so dear to Douglas and to me was forgotten amid heedless merriment, while the madeira cask was trundled from hand to hand, and endless jokes were made about Bob

Jones, the adjutant of the —th, whose wife, on his return from a long tour of duty, found in his hairbrush certain long golden hairs, that could never have belonged to his grizzled pate, and what a jolly row she made about it, writing a long letter to her father, the rich woolstapler, demanding a separate maintenance; but the said letter being posted by her Irish servant, Lanty Flannigan, and being underpaid, he had cut the four corners off to make it suit the views of the postal authorities as to weight.

From Dr. Forbes, a grave, hardheaded, and intelligent Aberdonian, I learned many new details of the war and the work we had in hand.

Sandilli, the paramount chief, was rather accomplished as a Caffre diplomatist, and had urged upon all the lesser chiefs the necessity of their making a last struggle for their independence.

He had spread among the people an intense dissatisfaction at British rule, and had enlisted the services and the interests of the Umlanjeni, or witch doctors, in whose prophecies and predictions of Queen Victoria's

downfall the Caffres placed implicit reliance. He refused to kiss the 'stick of peace,' though the governor had tried to force him at the head of the 73d Regiment and a battery of guns.

'Slay and eat,' was the cry of the Umlanjeni, and the Caffres, whose usual food is corn, roots and milk, resorted to animal food as a stimulus to ferocity, and rose in rebellion, committing dreadful outrages all along their frontier. At that time it was known that they possessed three thousand stand of arms, six millions of ball cartridges, and half a million of assegais.

Terror spread. The farmers almost entirely abandoned their kraals, and with their families sought shelter in the towns or forts, and the roads became impassable from the quantity of stock driven in. Near Fort Cox, the 91st Highlanders soon came to blows with Caffres, of whom they shot two hundred, but lost two gallant officers and twenty privates.

The Gaikas and Tambookies rose in arms, fifteen thousand strong. Kreli, a chief who could bring ten thousand warriors into the field, only waited a favourable opportunity to

do so; and along the ridge of the Amatola mountains, under Sandilli, were now a vast armed force of Caffres—how many thousands we knew not as yet—in position against us, and that position I knew must be forced before I should learn tidings of Clarice and her sister.

I longed for the hour of attack, for I had no other object in joining in the contest. My waggon, with our baggage, the soldiers' kits, and other et cetera left behind, came into camp next morning, driven by Speke van Bommel himself. In it were many relics of the lost ones, and the sight of those things filled my heart with an agony in which Douglas fully shared.

Carysfort was slowly, very slowly, recovering, the old Dutchman said; but nothing more had been heard at the village of the two ladies, so all our hopes of learning more were based on our successfully storming the position of Sandilli.

CHAPTER IV.

The attire of the 74th Highlanders and also of the 91st was smart and serviceable, though to look a hero in the uniform of the British line—'that specimen of how far the force of docking and beggary can go—that cramping of the limbs and curtailing of the proportions of man—that grotesque contrivance to scrape the human figure down to the shape and smoothness of a carrot'—is impossible.

A regimental blouse and pair of Campbell tartan trews, a Kilmarnock forage cap, and a pair of feldt-schoen were speedily provided for me by the quartermaster of H.M.'s 74th Foot, belts and a rifle were given me, and a few days later saw me a volunteer, *pro tem.*, serving, without heed to pay or promotion, in Douglas's company, and on the march towards those hostile mountains where all our hopes were centred.

For some time prior to this all had been preparation in the camp, and early on the morning of the 24th of June the 74th Regiment crossed the border of British Caffraria.

Our route lay over those level and grassy plains at the base of the Kroutzes, on the summits of which we could see the Caffres watching our advance below.

There the Cape corps made a dash and recaptured some forty head of cattle from a party of Caffre marauders, of whom they shot three or four while riding at full gallop.

As we marched along I stumbled over the corpse of one of them. I merely gave the body a casual glance as I stepped over it; but the next moment a cry escaped me, when I saw among the strings of beads and tigers' teeth which encircled the brawny neck of the savage, a European ornament — a gold necklet—the necklet of Clarice!

In an instant I stooped and possessed myself of it, and surveyed the grim savage sadly, earnestly, wistfully. His tongue might have told me all the terrible secret of the sisters' fate; but it was still now—yea, still as death could make it. He had been shot through

the head, and the bullets had completely shattered his left temple, for the Hottentots of the Cape corps often fired both barrels at once.

Douglas suggested that the discovery of the precious relic need not add to our apprehension, as it was probable enough the two hapless prisoners would be plundered of all their ornaments, perhaps even of their clothing.

After marching almost continuously for two hundred and fifty miles, we halted one evening on the bank of the Quesana River, and pitched our tents at last in sight of the beautiful Amatola mountains, the 'Gibraltar of the Gaikas,' which arose in dark and purple masses against the sky, as the hot sun of southern Africa sank behind them in a flood of crimson light.

Now the headquarters of Sandilli were before us.

My eyes wandered in keen interest from peak to peak. Did those of Clarice Haywood and Fanny Carysfort see the same mountain range on which we were looking now, or had death sealed their beautiful eyes for ever? A death of shame and of torture, too, perhaps.

I gazed again and again on the slender gold chain that had once encircled the adorable neck of her I loved, and my heart seemed to sicken and my eyes actually to fill with tears of rage and apprehension. But, alas! before long I was to have the presence of Clarice brought more vividly, strongly, and even tangibly before me, than even that slender necklet could do it.

Next forenoon several Caffres were killed in an encounter with the Mounted Rifles, and their huts and kraals were set in flames and destroyed.

That night Douglas and I were seated in his tent somewhat moodily, talking at intervals over the subject of which we never grew weary—the chances of our lost loves being safe and recaptured. The darkness had gathered densely round our guarded camp. On the slope of a gloomy and distant hill the flames were burning redly and brightly, where the Cape Rifles had set on fire the kraals of the Gaikas, and the howling of the wolves and jackals grew louder every moment.

'Pleasant idea to be wounded and left in the rear of advancing troops, with animals

howling about the field,' said Douglas. 'Listen to the howling of those horrible beggars, Dick.'

'Do you mean the fellows in the next tent, or the jackals alone?' I asked sullenly, for the merriment of others nettled me.

'Faith, I might say the same of both,' rejoined Douglas, 'for there is a jolly noise in Bonteine's tent, certainly; but Jack enjoys a perpetual row—can hardly keep silent, even when under arms.'

The tent of that jovial officer adjoined ours, and there, by the light of a guttering tallow candle, placed in the socket of a bayonet, which was improvised as a candlestick with its blade stuck in the turf, he was entertaining a party of guests, each of whom brought with him his own tin-tot, canteen and biscuits; and during a pause in the merriment, the mellow voice of Archy Campbell was heard, singing a well-known military song.

Just as it was concluded, and we were about to join this party or one of the many groups of officers who, in pea-jackets or blanket coats, were gathered round the camp fires,

where they lounged on the grass, smoking and watching the steaming camp kettles of hot coffee, the servant of Douglas, a grave and sombre Scot, named Robert Bruce, appeared at the triangular door of the tent, and presented me with a packet sealed up in a half sheet of an old *Cape Argus*. It was directed to 'Captain Haddon,' and the wax bore as seal the unpleasant impression of a large and coarse thumb.

The packet felt soft and pulpy, and I paused before opening it.

'Bruce, from whom came this?' I asked.

'I received it, sir, from the corporal of the outlying picquet.'

'And who gave it to him?'

'One of the advanced sentries, sir, to whom it was given by a man in the uniform of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and whom he strongly suspects to be a deserter.'

'A deserter? Why?'

'Because he had no other arms than a couple of assegais, and after speaking he immediately disappeared by plunging into the bush.'

'Suspicious, certainly.'

This was all strange, but I tore the packet open.

'Hair! Human hair, by heaven! The hair of Clarice!' I exclaimed, as a quantity of that bright chestnut hair—those soft and silky tresses which I had kissed and caressed so often—appeared before me. 'Good heaven! oh, what can this mean, Gerard?'

'Perhaps this letter will explain,' replied Douglas, in a voice that, like my own, was hoarse and weak with apprehension, as he stooped to pick something from the ground. 'It fell out as you opened the packet, and it is addressed to you, Dick.'

'Open it, Gerard, and read,' said I, trembling in every limb, while a dimness came over my sight.

Douglas knelt on the grassy floor of the tent, close by our candle, which was sputtering away in the socket of Bruce's bayonet, and read as follows:—

'This here hair enclosed is for you, Captain Haddon. You knows well enuff whose head I cut it off, and the head itself shall follow, and the body, too, j'int by j'int, perhaps, un-

less you pays over to me the sum of two thousand pounds, in good rix-dollars, or English gold, to be delivered to a Gaika woman as I shall send for the ransom. I have your two friends safe enuff, and far enuff in rear of Sandilli's army to keep them out of your reach for ever, if I choose. So no more at present, but remains, as you deserve,

'MARK SHARKEIGH, *alias* GRAAFF.'

'The scoundrel!' I exclaimed, in a voice, the hollowness of which startled even myself. 'The double-dyed scoundrel! He is quite capable of putting his threat in execution. Oh, Clarice, Clarice!' I added, kissing the hair, and stroking it with a tenderness that was almost fatuous. 'I would give twenty thousand—yes, every farthing I have in the world to ensure your safety, my darling!'

'Perhaps they are safer with this man's gang than if with Sandilli,' suggested Douglas.

'Can you think so, after all the horrible crimes this half lunatic has committed since he escaped to the bush, where he has been known under the colonial name of Mark Graaff?'

'True,' said Douglas mournfully.

'An outrage more or less—a life taken more or less—are as nothing to him; and then Clarice and Fanny are so lovely—so lovely, Douglas, and so helpless.'

'We must seize the Gaika woman,' said Douglas, twisting his moustaches, and grinding his teeth. 'Seize her, and force her under terror of death to confess all she knows, and perhaps we may get a party of the Fingo levy guided to the spot where the girls are detained. But see, there is a postcript written on the other side of that dirty piece of paper.'

'True—so there is.'

It ran thus—

'P.S.—If my messenger, the Gaika woman, is took, or detained, or followed, worse will befall old Haywood's daughters *than has befallen them yet*, so look out, Captain Haddon. I hav'n't forgot that tap on the head as you gave me on that day I was poachin' in Teviotdale.'

This postscript added to the horror and apprehension we had that something terrible

must have been undergone by Clarice and Fanny, and that even the slender hope of turning the capture of the Gaika woman to account was baffled now. He took his measures to torture me well.

I sat in a stricken and almost stupefied condition, staring at the tresses of hair, and twisting them round my fingers lovingly, while they brought her soft face, her gentle presence, and her thrilling voice more vividly to memory than even the gold necklet had done yesterday.

When these had been cut from her head was she dead or alive? I often asked myself this, for my mind was perplexed by intense horror. She might already be dead, and abandoned by those wretches to the jackals. All her sorrows and sufferings might be over —things of the past—while her beautiful hair was only sent to me by the infamous bush-ranger as a lure, a taunt, or a means of extortion.

Amid these thoughts I was roused by the voice of Burns, who was on duty as orderly sergeant, and who said respectfully, as he appeared at the tent door—

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'All light and fires out at seven this evening, Captain Douglas. At five in the morning the division will get under arms, without sound of music or bugle, or any noise whatever.'

'Very good; that will do.'

He raised his hand to the peak of his cap, and wheeled off to the next tent in succession to repeat his orders.

While in every other tent the anticipated attack was the subject of deepest interest and animated discussion, Douglas and I had a topic nearer our hearts, and far into the dark hours of the long night we talked of it, as we lay on our pallets, with our uniforms on.

Sleep or utter weariness was at last just overpowering me, when Bruce, the captain's servant, appeared in heavy marching order, with his greatcoat rolled on the top of his knapsack, his kettle strapped thereto, and wooden canteen by his side, armed and accoutred for the march, to make the welcome yet inexorable announcement—

'Gentlemen, the regiment is falling in.'

'Is our pack-horse ready?' asked Douglas.

'Yes, sir, and loaded with your patrol tent, camp-kettle, and three days' provisions.'

'All right, Bruce. Chuck on the pallets and plaids, give me my claymore, and now, Dick Haddon, to begin the game of vengeance in earnest.'

CHAPTER V.

Leaving behind us a camp guard of three hundred Infantry under a captain, the division under Major-General Somerset fell in by regiments and brigades. In perfect silence the companies were inspected by the imperfect light of the early morning; the words of command were issued in a low tone; no drum was beaten, no bagpipe or bugle blown, as we marched to the base of the mountains, and commenced the ascent of the Western Amatolas.

I felt reckless of my life, or, if I valued it at all, it was only that I might live to learn the safety of Clarice and her sister, or to avenge them fearfully if they had perished.

Sharkeigh and Adrian Africander I marked out specially for death, and had generally vague ideas of showing no quarter whatever to any Cape Mounted deserters who fell in my way, for, had all the men of that corps

been loyal and true, the abduction had never taken place; but now, as we marched on, unpleasantly enough, the recent surmises of Douglas as to being wounded or killed, and left to the maws of the wolves and jackals, occurred to me, though a secondary evil so far as I was concerned.

Amid that armed host then ascending the mountains I alone, perhaps, had any deep personal interest in the strife. Officers and soldiers alike knew that the war in this remote region was one which excited little interest in Britain, and none whatever in the rest of Europe; they knew that they had to endure toil, privation, and suffering, the risk of wounds and death in fighting vast hordes of brave and well-armed savages, from whose conquest little honour ever accrues, nor would one badge be added to the many on their colours, won on the more brilliant battle-fields of civilised countries. Yet the British soldier is not given to repining, so all marched steadily and cheerfully on.

Day broke with tropical rapidity, and through clouds that were like mighty bars or flakes of gold and purple sheen, the sun came

up in all his glory, just as our brigade reached the summits of the western ridge, and deployed into line along them, with all our colours waving in the morning breeze.

The third colour of the 74th was unfurled in the centre of the regiment, for I here may mention that, like the 78th Highlanders, the corps carries three—one being in memory of the field of Assaye, an honour conferred on no other battalions of the line.

The Caffres, in moving clouds, covered all the slope of the Victoria Heights at some distance on our right flank, and while the general, with a party of the doubtfully loyal Cape Mounted Rifles, galloped forward to reconnoitre them, we were halted, and could look quietly on.

Between us and the position of Sandilli lay a beautiful valley of the most brilliantly green grass, studded with clumps of darker foliage —the protea, mimosa, and tulip tree. On our left flank rose the steep and conical peak, named the Hogsback, the most lofty of that mountain chain. Below it yawned a deep ravine or kloof, covered with dark and dense forest trees, through the centre of which a

cataract, white as snow, tore on its passage to the Keiskamma and the Indian Sea.

On the opposite side of this lovely valley, and all along the lower ridge of the mountains, the smoke of the Caffre campfires curled into the blue sky slowly and grayly upward from the dark scraggy bush and steep rocks that indicated and protected their position; and the flash of steel came brightly forth at times from a thousand points as the sun's hot rays were caught on a musket barrel or the blade of a weapon.

We could see that the general, after reaching the southern point of the range, had a brisk fire opened upon him and his party. From hundreds of points the white jets or puffs of smoke started out of the green woods, and we saw the horses of the Cape Rifles prancing and plunging as their riders returned the fire.

Immediately on this taking place, two companies of the 91st Highlanders and three of the European and Fingo levies went forward at the double, under a lieutenant-colonel of the Rifles, while the general returned to the main body.

'Well, Calder,' said Douglas to the little ensign who had spoken so flippantly about Malta, 'you are about to be under fire for the first time.'

'But not the last, I hope.'

'And how do you like the idea?'

'I would rather face a cannon-ball, or an assegai, or anything, than endure one hour of Euclid, Straith's "Fortification," quadratic equations, Vauban, or any of the other bores of the Sandhurst curriculum.'

'"It will all be as nothing one hundred years hence,"' sang Bonteine, while practising several cuts with his sword on a prickly pear.

'Silence, if you please, gentlemen,' said Colonel Fordyce, shortening his rein. 'Here comes an aide-de-camp.'

At that moment Percival Graves, with all the fuss and *empressement* peculiar to the staff officer, whether at a fight or a field-day, 'looking a little white about the gills, however,' as Bonteine said, galloped up to our brigade, and reining his horse sharply back upon its haunches, paused ere speaking, for he was almost breathless.

I smiled bitterly at myself on recalling the

hours of jealousy he had caused me elsewhere, now when I looked up at him from the flank of Douglas's company, where I stood in my place, to all appearance a private soldier.

'The—aw, aw—brigade is to advance, colonel,' said Graves.

'In what direction?'

'Forward, into the valley; the cavalry and pack-horses are to move by the—aw, aw —left, where the descent is less steep.'

In obedience to this command our brigade advanced in line, descending, in a somewhat scrambling fashion, the steep slope, and when we reached the grassy bottom, 'Form columns of subdivisions' was the order, and in this formation we crossed the valley to the bank of a stream, and then found that our part of the game was drawing nigh.

The enemy's position, which we now saw to be a ridge of apparently impregnable rocks, rose sheer as a wall or rampart from the steep, bare slope of the mountains, which were there smoothly scarped by the hand of nature. There was but one point in which the general found an assault practicable, and all along that terrible ridge, quietly awaiting our attack, we

saw the dark bands of Sandilli clustered in thousands, their muskets, knives, and steel ramrods flashing incessantly in the sun.

'To you, 74th, I assign the glory of attacking the most dangerous point,' cried the general, waving his cap, as he galloped past us.

We rapidly deployed into line.

'Forward, men,' cried Colonel Fordyce, brandishing his sword. 'Forward, and mount the hill like true Highlanders.'

With a hearty cheer the regiment responded, and dashing through the stream, began in a semicircular line to advance up the mountain slope, which an officer has correctly described as 'bare and slippery as the roof of a house.'

The heat of the sun was like that from the mouth of a blazing furnace, and there was not a breath of air in the open valley or the dark forest beyond. We could hear the hard breathing in the ranks as we pushed upward, and as yet the only firing that had taken place was when Colonel Sutton's little column was briskly assailing the left of the Caffre position.

Those in our front allowed us to come almost within half musket-range before,

from the shelter of their formidable natural fortress, they opened a dreadful fusilade upon us. A line of white smoke streaked with flashes of red fire in an instant garlanded the upper edge of the rocks, where we could see nothing of the foe save their black woolly heads, as they popped up for a moment to take aim, and vanished with an exultant yell to reload.

In veritable showers the round balls of the old Tower muskets with which they were armed—balls, twelve to the pound—whistled about us. With many of those muskets I had supplied them in my bartering expeditions, little foreseeing the use to which they would be applied.

The roar of the adverse musketry was repeated by a hundred grand and rolling reverberations in the kloofs and valleys, as the sound was reëchoed and tossed from side to side.

Perched on the trees at a distance many a vulture looked quietly and ominously on; but out of a thousand crevices in the rocks before us the baboons, the rat-faced dossies, and even antelopes, fled hither and thither in terror and

bewilderment. The blue smoke rose lazily in the calm, hot air from the Caffre rocks, to be continually replaced by more smoke and fire, while the bullets mowed all the turf about our feet, or flattened out like silver stars as they struck the stones and bare places.

Steadily pushing on, while mounting we returned their fire with well-directed volleys from our superior arms, which had, of course, percussion locks, while theirs had the old flints and priming pans. But they were firing downward and we upward, on an angle that speedily became more acute than even forty-five degrees.

For a full quarter of an hour the roar of musketry was deafening, till on drawing near we had in many instances to sling our rifles and scramble upward by hand and knee.

Gravel, with stones and splinters of stone and lead, were dashed in our faces by the terrible fire to which we were exposed. The mess-tins, the rolled greatcoats and knapsacks of the men, were cut and torn to pieces, while the killed and wounded were falling fast on every side, the latter rolling with shrieks and groans, uplifted arms and legs, helplessly down

the slope, where often another and another shot struck them, and ultimately—perhaps fortunately—ended their agony.

My covering file was shot through the arm and side, a man on my left had his left hand shattered by a ball, which went clean through the barrel of his rifle. A lieutenant of ours, named Bruce, had an arm shattered, and crawled away fainting with heat and agony combined.

A man near me, who was shot in the heart, uttered a wild and terrible cry as he fell on his face—a cry that seemed to come from a spasmodic corpse.

'Hit by Jove!' cried Douglas, staggering, almost immediately after.

'Where, old fellow?' cried I, rushing to support him.

'It is only a scratch in the arm here. Tie my handkerchief round it, and Forbes will make it all right by and by.'

And though he had to clench his teeth with pain, the brave fellow never left the head of his company.

Climbing from rock to rock, and exchanging shots with the enemy at remarkably close

quarters, fighting their way upward inch by inch, the 74th Highlanders at last planted their three colours, amid ringing cheers, on the ridge of the Amatolas; but the Caffres gave us no time to use the bayonet, as they fled *en masse* in dusky thousands to the shelter of a dense forest in rear of their position.

We were in the heart of their once formidable natural fortress, from which they had carried off their dead and wounded, so no trace remained of them, save a few rusty Tower muskets, powder horns, and bundles of assegais; roasted marrow bones, torn cartridge paper, and vast gouts of blood splashed on the rocks, or still dripping over them, with insects battening therein amid the sunshine.

We had carried the Amatolas, but unless the Gaika woman came with her message, as I hoped she would do, quietly and mysteriously in the night, I was as far from achieving the freedom of Clarice as ever. But the fierce and new excitement of the conflict had been for a time a relief to me from my aching and bitter, bitter thoughts of her and of her sister; and certain I am that the emotions of Douglas were exactly similar.

I had fired thirty rounds of ball cartridge, and knowing the usual accuracy of my aim, believed that many more than one Caffre had that day learned, under my hand, the great secret of time and eternity. Many of my bullets I had sent where I could detect a gray crane's pinion—the badge of chieftainship, even as that of the eagle was in Scotland—in the hope that one might reach Sandilli. With frequent loading and casting about, my arms and hands were stiff and weary now.

From the rocky ridge of the Caffre position, I looked sadly down on the green slope by which we had ascended. It was thickly dotted by prostrate figures in tartan trews and blue blouses. Many a poor fellow lay dying there, thinking of his parents in their Scottish homes, or of the future of his wife and children in this bitter world, rather than of his own in the other—the land of shadows—to which he was now so close and nigh.

CHAPTER VI.

I COULD little foresee how deplorably this day was to end for me.

We had barely drawn breath and looked about us on the crest we had won with such toil and peril, when Graves, who was afoot now, as his horse had been shot under him, approached the colonel in haste.

'Fordyce,' said he, with a brief salute, 'you are to push forward and clear the forest. Such is the order of General Somerset.'

We knew by experience that this would be perilous work, as every thicket, hollow tree, branch aloft, and jackal's hole below, may hide for a time the stealthy Caffre, till the whistle or the war-whoop brings a horde of naked savages yelling from the secret ambuscade. We disliked the attack more than the open assault we had just made with such success, yet there was nothing for us but to obey.

'Forward!' was the word, after we had reloaded and capped, and with our arms sloped we marched steadily across the grassy table-land between the mountain ridge and the forest.

'Those fiends have the advantage of us again,' said Douglas, for though we could not detect one of them, so artfully and ably were they hidden, they opened a fire upon us, and soon killed several of our men.

Douglas's wound — which he would not allow Forbes to dress, notwithstanding the heat of the day, till nearly every other wounded man had been attended to—was troubling him severely now; but, as Colonel Fordyce said, 'Gerard was animated by a spirit worthy of Sydney, the soldier of Zutphen.'

The colonel had his uniform torn by a bullet, and the adjutant had his havresack rent by another—both narrow escapes. One man was shot through the brain, and fell dead at my feet without a groan; another, who was hit mortally in the region of the heart, uttered that wild and unearthly cry of which I have spoken, and died in a few minutes.

Ping, ping—whizz, whizz—came the balls

out of the forest, amid the green foliage of which the light blue smoke was curling; but not a brown Caffre was visible, though we could hear the peculiar cry with which they always taunted the 74th Highlanders,

'Nina ez 'inngulo! Nina ez 'inngulo!'

Meaning, 'Holloa, you tortoises!' from a fancied resemblance between the stripes of the Campbell tartan and the chequer of the tortoises, which abound in their plains or flats, and perhaps also from the slow motions of the infantry soldier when compared to their own baboon-like activity.

We poured a rattling volley into the forest at random, levelling low. Many a tree stem was barked, into others the bullets sank thud; but some found more fitting marks, for though the Caffres always, if possible, carry off their dead, yet never bury them, as we plunged with bayonets fixed into the forest we found seventeen or eighteen lying 'grim and gash' in death, while the numerous gouts, or blood spoor, showed where others had fallen.

We afterwards learned that in this skirmish the enemy's loss had been very great. Several chiefs were among the slain, and the

great Sandilli, who was directing his men in person, was nearly taken by three Highlanders, and only escaped by creeping on his hands and knees into a dense and secret part of the bush.

The sudden gloom of the old primeval forest, with its overhead entwinings of creepers and baboon ropes, after the fierce white glare of the sunshine, was somewhat perplexing to us as we rushed on in very open and somewhat confused order.

Sometimes our men fired straight up into a tree, where they could detect a leg or an arm among the branches, and then, with gun and horn, a bleeding Caffre fell crash at our feet.

Driving them before us, contesting every rock and bush and tree, we pushed on through the forest to where the trees became scarcer, and the wood more open; but even there the ground was studded by enormous masses of detached rock, overgrown with asparagus bushes, round which thousands of baboon ropes and flowering trailers were entwined, with wild vines, thorns, and prickly pears, that tore the clothes and flesh from us; but on we

went resolutely, till the firing died away, and the colonel's orderly bugler sounded the welcome halt, just as darkness was closing.

It was then that a gallant episode occurred among some soldiers of the 74th Highlanders, whose singular conjunction of great or historic names, though common enough in their country, rendered the event somewhat remarkable.

Sergeant Robert Burns of Douglas's company, led on by his own ardour, had skirmished rather too far in advance, and fell, a ball having pierced his leg—almost the last shot fired that evening against us. As he was crawling back towards the halted regiment, a dozen of wild and perfectly naked Caffres started from a cluster of Caffre and hartebeest huts, which we thought were empty, and rushed with yells towards him. Then Douglas and the men who were with him turned to save the sergeant.

Gerard's revolver knocked over three of the Caffres by three successive shots, and the rest, appalled by the aspect of a pistol which seemed calculated to fire for ever, drew back, launching their assegais nevertheless. Cor-

poral William Wallace, a powerful and active man, now lifted Burns on his back, and while his retreat was covered by Privates Robert Bruce and Roderick Murchison, with their bayonets fixed, bore him into the midst of the regiment.

The beehive-shaped huts were then set on fire, without its being known that they were filled with wounded Caffres, whose shrieks, as they were scorched or burned to death, made up a horrible medley of sounds.

The regiment now began to return through the forest, to reach the bivouac where the 91st Highlanders, like good fellows as they were, had prepared a repast for us; and on vine stretchers we bore with us several of our killed and wounded men.

The wound of poor Douglas was now most dangerously inflamed.

'If you should lose your limb—' I suggested.

'Then,' said he, with a sickly smile, 'I shall have to take to some other trade. Give up the profession of arms, certainly, when I have but one.'

Darkness was now increasing fast, and on

seeing something white glimmering among the grass near the foot of a tree a little way off—some twenty yards or so on our left—as I was alone and in the rear of the last company, I fell out of the ranks to discover what it was, and found the pale white corpse of a Highlander stripped nude, and gashed by many a hideous wound.

At that moment, a blow dealt me downwards from above, by the hand of some savage lurking in a tree—a blow from the butt-end of a musket or knobkerrie (war-club)—laid me senseless beside the dead man, and for a time I remembered no more.

How long I lay there I know not; but on recovering sense and power of motion, I could see that the rays of the moon were here and there shining or piercing through the wonderfully entwined roof of leaves and trailers above me.

One beam rested coldly on the sharp features of the corpse beside me, and I could see his glazed eye and his hair shining, as it was gemmed by globules of dew as if with diamonds.

I strove to rise, but again sank back power-

less. There was not a sound in the forest save the drowsy hum of insect life among the underwood, and the silence was most oppressive; yet I feared to call for aid, and lay still for some minutes, breathing heavily.

While stretched thus helpless, I heard the flap of wings, and a monstrous vulture alighted plump on my breast, and I could see its sharp beak and its fierce eyes, which glittered like those of a demon, close to my face.

I closed mine instinctively, and as the ominous words of Douglas, concerning the wolf and the raven, came terribly to memory now, a cry like a groan escaped me, and on this the vulture fled with an angry croak.

'Nina ez 'inngulo!' said a taunting voice, and on looking up, I saw the tall, dark figure of a Caffre, wearing the tiger-skin kaross and cranes' feathers—the double badge of power—with a round shield on his arm, a musket in one hand, and a bundle of assegais in the other, standing over me.

Then the horror of a barbarous death, after terrible mutilation, filled my heart, and I gave myself up for lost.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, how fared it with Clarice Haywood and little Fanny Carysfort?

Some time after their abduction, and subsequent to our storming the position of Sandilli, and driving his followers through the wood beyond it, as I have recorded, saw them both located in a deserted Dutch kraal, of which Mark Graaff, or Sharkeigh, had taken possession, in a remote part of the province of Queenstown, situated somewhere between the White Kei River and the Zum Bergen, about fifty miles in rear of the Amatolas, and in a flat karroo or plain.

The latter was of great extent, and studded with clumps of pine and mimosa trees, and there the long-legged ostrich and the fiery-eyed hartebeest were visible at times. Sharp-pointed peaks of rugged and fantastic forms

closed in the background, cleft by many a steep, dark, shady kloof, and endless bush or forest clothed their sides.

The kraal was in a solitary and secluded place; the fields where the industrious Dutch boor had cultivated pumpkins, millet, maize, and melons, sweet potatoes and tobacco for the Queenstown market, were now an unheeded waste, where the cries of the nighthawks, the hyena and jackal, or the hoarse piping of the bullfrog, alone broke the silence.

In a chamber of the kraal which had once been a species of dining-room, floored with brick tiles, and having prettily papered walls, now all soiled, splashed, and defaced, the sisters were crouching together on a rickety sofa. The furniture, once neat and handsome, and all European, had been grievously smashed and misused by Sharkeigh and his drunken associates.

In a corner of this room were some sacks of meal and a heap of Indian corn, part of the fugitive boor's stores, of which these robbers had possessed themselves. Sharkeigh himself sat in a corner of the room, drinking and smoking, and eyeing Clarice and Fanny from

time to time with a deep smile of malignant triumph. Near the sisters, seated on the floor, was an emaciated Bushwoman, whose form was so attenuated that it appeared like a skeleton covered by a wet and closely adhering cloth of snuff colour. She was nursing a half-Caffre child, a bantling of Mark Sharkeigh's, which she supplied from time to time with goat's milk from an ostrich-eggshell; and during this occupation, ever and anon she would grin malevolently at Clarice and Fanny, for she could perceive that they regarded her with ill-concealed aversion and horror.

As yet no greater outrage than simply carrying them off, making them suffer the extremity of terror, and detaining them as prisoners, had been perpetrated upon the unfortunate girls.

To the dusky Caffre women, Fanny was a greater wonder and marvel than even Clarice, with her glittering golden hair, her slightness of form, and white purity of skin, her singular brilliance and loveliness.

The rich flowing auburn hair of Clarice, or much of it rather, had been cut off and sent to me, as already stated; and the Gaika wo-

man had been despatched to me, with orders to hover about the camp until she could speak with me concerning a ransom for both ladies, otherwise the alternative would be frightful.

They had been duly informed of all this, and were waiting now in an agony of uncertainty and fear, not that they doubted me, but feared the skill of the ambassadress to carry out the negotiation.

Two days had elapsed, and the Gaika woman had not returned, though she was well mounted on a Cape horse, and the karroo was open and level nearly to the base of the Amatolas.

They sat in silence, broken only by their sighs, and the clatter of the knobkerries of two Hottentots, who were beating out or threshing maize on the tiled floor, until Adrian Africander—who being always of a somewhat amorous nature was not without some special and personal views concerning Fanny—came hurriedly into the room, exclaiming, in an excited manner—

'Baas Graaff—ghroote Baas Graaff—ver damte skellums—der Englanders—allamachtig—ya, ya!'

'What the deuce is up, woolly head? Have you gone mad?' growled Sharkeigh angrily.

'Der teufel's up, indeed! Sandilli am defeated, and der Schotlanders—tortoises in the striped crackers—are coming on!'

'The Highlanders?'

'Ya, ya, baas—der Berg Schotten and English roebarges (redcoats). One from the hills would speak with you, baas.'

'One! A soldier?'

'No, baas.'

'Who then? Speak out!'

'The Gaika woman.'

Sharkeigh uttered an oath, leaped from his seat, and left the room, followed by the rascal whilom my attendant.

'Oh, Clarice, what will become of us—what shall we do?' wailed Fanny for the hundredth time, laying her pretty head wearily on the soft bosom of her sister.

'What can we do, darling, but watch and wait?'

'Wait for what?'

'Whatever heaven pleases.'

'I am sick of waiting—among these hor-

rible people too!' exclaimed Fanny, who did not quite realise all their danger.

'Wait and pray, Fanny.'

'Pray! I am tired of praying. I would rather see Fordyce and the 74th, or Sutton and his Cape Mounted Riflemen.'

'Hush, Fanny, and don't talk of them—the odious and treacherous Hottentots!' exclaimed Clarice, while her hazel eyes flashed with as much hatred and loathing as her gentle nature was capable of feeling.

'True, sister,' said Fanny plaintively. 'In the hands of these men we are powerless, and can, as you urge, but wait and pray.'

'Yes, and hopefully now, for Sandilli has been defeated, and the troops of the line, and the faithful Fingo levies, are doubtless coming this way.'

'There has been a battle fought then?'

'You heard the tidings of Africander.'

'Ah, who may have been killed, and who survive? Oh, Clarice!' exclaimed Fanny, 'I now repent sorely of ever wavering in my love for Carysfort; but Gerard did, I know, so love me, that after years were past the dear fellow could remember the very colours of the

ribbons and dresses I had worn at particular times. Dear, good souls! Shall we ever see them both again?'

'And Dick Haddon?'

'Dick, of course—I don't forget him.'

'We may never see any of them, and must be prepared for the worst.'

'Clarice darling,' exclaimed Fanny, clasping her sister closer, 'if our lives should cease to be worth having, if we could never more even look on those who love us most—you understand me, sister?—if we are forced to die—oh, if we are forced to die!'

'Well, Fanny, my sweet one, we must all die when our allotted time comes.'

'But, Clarice, I am not so well prepared as you.'

'You are sinless as a child, Fanny—a pigeon without gall. But remember we are in the hands of heaven.'

'Of heaven?' queried Fanny petulantly, and a little irreverently. 'I would that we were, for we seem to be in the hands of Caffres and merciless boors.'

'I remember once reading in a book that "when Adam fell the earth grew dark; but

God, indeed, was still everywhere. Still the great and guilty world rolled on while He held it up, and in His unseen presence His sinful creatures lived and moved;" and so be assured, Fanny, that God is with us now.'

'I would, Clarice, that I had your courage, your hope, your resignation, and keen sense of religion; but I have none of these, and am, as you see, only a poor little trembler.'

Mark Sharkeigh did not return, and the tidings of the defeat of Sandilli so excited the Hottentot servants or slaves, that they abandoned the task of threshing the maize and went forth into the courtyard of the kraal, where others were assembled round Adrian Africander, all jabbering in their native dialect, in broken English, or low Dutch of the most grotesque kind, and smoking the while hempseed, through hubble-bubbles of bullock's horn.

And the sisters sat thus alone, Fanny reclining on Clarice, and both watching with sad and earnest eyes the bright stars of the Southern Cross, as the darkness came round them.

They made no attempt to escape, feeling

perfectly certain that any such effort would be hopeless. Though but fifty miles or so from our outposts, they thought the distance much greater, as Sharkeigh, Africander, and the other deserters had brought them to the kraal by a long detour round the right flank of Sandilli's position, and by the base of the Hogsback mountain.

They were afoot now, without means, money, or strength, without escort, guide, or defence, and without a knowledge of the way. The country was infested by wild animals—the wolf, hippopotamus, leopard, and hyena, even the terrible man-eating lion, were all there, and in the open karroo were bands of prowling savages, outlawed half-breeds, and such innumerable perils, that the danger of flight seemed almost greater than that to be encountered by remaining, especially while Sharkeigh had the hope of a magnificent ransom.

CHAPTER VIII.

Terror and the utter discomfort of their situation on one hand, with the slender hope of escape or sudden release on the other, and with these a natural dread of what might ensue, usually prevented the sisters from undressing for the night; and so, seated just where I have described them in that now squalid room, the sisters, who usually slept by turns, had now fallen asleep together, overwhelmed or overpowered by long-continued emotion and irrepressible anxiety, and the night was considerably advanced when Clarice was roused by a heavy hand grasping roughly the arm which encircled the slender waist of Fanny, who had gone to slumber like a child with her head on her elder sister's shoulder.

Starting to sudden wakefulness, Clarice looked up, and saw by the light of the moon, which streamed through the curtainless win-

dow, with great brilliance, like a silver flood, the hideous face and ungainly form of Mark Graaff, alias Sharkeigh.

Mark had cast aside his round jacket and waistcoat, as if he had been preparing to retire for the night, but had suddenly changed his mind, which was precisely the case, and now he appeared only in his shirt-sleeves and yellow leathern crackers.

'Oh!' exclaimed Clarice, with a shudder of dread, for she could perceive by a glance that he was partially intoxicated, that his face was flushed, that his lips and the livid scar were awfully pale, and that his horrid eyes were bloodshot.

She knew that one of those boxes, which at the Cape are generally painted red and filled with square case bottles of Dutch gin, carefully packed in sawdust, had been found that morning in a nook of the kraal, and that unlimited drinking had begun among the bushrangers. Clarice thought of all this with terror, and apprehension that her worst fears were about to be realised.

'Has the ransom come?' she asked tremulously.

Sharkeigh uttered an oath that made her blood run cold.

'I have not come to talk about that,' said he in a husky whisper.

'About what then, my good fellow?'

'Don't "good fellow" me, or think to gammon me in that fashion,' he growled; 'for I am not a good fellow, and you don't think me one.'

'What seek you here, then, at this hour?'

'Something I should have looked for ere this.'

'And what is it?'

'You yourself, mistress.'

'Fanny,' began Clarice, in intense agitation.

'Don't rouse her,' said Sharkeigh, with a low, fierce, hissing voice in the shrinking ear of Clarice; 'don't rouse her, I say, for I don't want her silly squalling to rouse others. Do you understand?'

'Oh, sir, what do you wish me to do?' implored Clarice.

'To come away with me, mistress, and come quickly, or—'

'Or what?'

'I'll drag you, that's all,' he responded, in a bullying whisper.

'But where do you wish me to go—at this time of night, too?' asked Clarice, in a breathless voice, while an unuttered prayer rose to her lips for some guidance and protection, and even for time to think of the deadly peril that was now so close and nigh.

'Where?' repeated Sharkeigh, insolently mimicking her tone and manner, while again seizing her tender arm and balancing himself alternately against her and on his heels, for his potations had rendered him unsteady. 'What does it matter to you where? T'other side of the kraal, that's all.'

'But for what purpose?' persisted Clarice, with a little courage that grew out of her utter desperation, and with it came the longing for a weapon wherewith to defend herself.

'You'll deuced soon know,' was the surly response; 'too soon for your dainty taste, perhaps. But I have something to tell you.'

'Tidings from the camp—from Richard Haddon?'

'Yes,' said Sharkeigh, gnashing his teeth,

for the mention of my name always inflamed him with a hate that seemed born of insanity.

Upon this assurance, Clarice softly and gently deposited the head of her sleeping sister on a pillow of the dark and discoloured chintz. Her fair, waxen face and masses of golden hair, made her seem most fairy-like in the clear, cold brilliance of the moon.

'Lead on, sir,' said Clarice, rising, after lightly kissing her sister's forehead; 'I shall follow you.'

Passing from the dining-room into the tiled entrance-hall, and from thence under a broad verandah, where were several of Sharkeigh's brother bushrangers lying snoring in drunken slumber, with their rifles and knives beside them, they crossed the courtyard of the kraal, and entered a kind of spacious barn, where there still lay great piles of unthreshed Indian corn and maize, the property of the fugitive boor, and when using that term, I should mention that, though in English it is adopted as being descriptive of a man who is rough, illiterate, or uneducated, in Dutch it simply means a farmer or agriculturist.

Sharkeigh was without any weapon, but a

mortal terror seized Clarice when she saw the vast gloomy space of the barn, with all its shadowy uncertainties—a terror that he was about to destroy her in the mere lust of cruelty and revenge, for she had heard and read of such events taking place in barns occasionally.

'What have you to tell me here that could not have been told me by my sister's side?' asked Clarice.

'She'll soon enough know what I have to tell you,' said Sharkeigh, with unmistakable leer, as he grasped her wrists. 'I begin to get tired of my darkey—my Caffre wife, and mean to have you, do you understand that, eh? And as for Richard Haddon,' he added, grinding his teeth, 'he sha'n't get even the reversion of you; for living or dead, you shall never quit the bush now.'

'But, Mr. Sharkeigh—'

'Mister Sharkeigh!' he exclaimed, as he swung her fiercely round. 'Don't think to gammon me, I tell you; it won't do. I've been quiet too long,' he added, in a bullying tone.

'But the ransom—the ransom!' urged Clarice, striving in vain to free her tender wrists from his rude and felon grasp.

'It will never come now.'

'Why—oh, why?'

'Ha, ha! Who's to send it?'

'Captain Haddon promised.'

'Haddon is killed, or taken by the Caffres, which is precisely the same thing, so says the Gaika woman, who saw the fight from the Hogsback Mountain. His precious game is played out, and by this time he'll be helping to fatten the jackals and hyenas of the Amatola woods.'

'Oh!' moaned Clarice, 'is this indeed true?'

'Ay, mistress; true as that I now have you here in this barn, and quite at my mercy.'

'Why speak you thus of one who never injured you?' asked Clarice, thinking more of her lost lover than of her own terrible danger.

'Who never injured me, do you say?' cried Sharkeigh, with a ferocious imprecation. 'Who drove me first to bad courses, but those Haddons of Haddonrig? Who, from a truant boy, punished for robbing their orchard, made a poacher and a gaolbird of me? and who, from an outcast, made me a thief and a convict, but those Haddons of Haddonrig, with their trespass laws, game laws — their pre-

tended right of shooting here and fishing there? Who nearly broke my skull in a poaching row? Your lover, Dick Haddon! But I have had my revenge. I helped old Prue Grubb with her queer marriage scheme, and passed off a brat of mine as one of hers, and thus did him out of his birthright at home. Here, in Africa, I have carried off his bride, and when I tire of you I may give your heart to the jackals, who have likely had his ere now.'

'Oh, have mercy!' wailed Clarice, endeavouring to free her hands from his grasp.

'What mercy had old Halbert Haddon on me when he drove me out of the country to Liverpool, where I was deprived of my ticket-of-leave, and sentenced to ten years' transportation? Ten years! ten years! How it maddened me to see "ten years" painted on my cell door, "ten years" branded on my right arm; "ten years" were ever in my heart and on my lips, till, with the help of the devil, I suppose, I made my escape and came here—how matters nothing. One thing is sure, I have you fast enough, and mean to keep you so.'

Clarice was pale as a lily; her eyes were

dilated and her lips parted with terror. She was trembling, and on the verge of fainting, yet out of the very fear of that event she gathered a false courage and resisted with all her strength, when Sharkeigh threw his arms round her, and pressed his horrid, fetid mouth again and again on her pure and beautiful cheek and neck.

Her loneliness and perfect helplessness, instead of winning a grain of pity for her, only served to increase the tempest of evil and desire that glowed in her captor's heart. He daringly ran his coarse hands over her neck and bosom; her hair soon became more dishevelled than ever, and hung over her shoulders. She writhed, panted, and resisted, but as yet dared not to shriek lest she might bring the same terrors upon her sister, or perhaps summon from among the sleepers in the verandah those who would not only witness, but assist in the consummation of her disgrace with exultation and fiendish pleasure.

Seized thus, and by such merciless hands, she could only falter out—

'Oh, heaven, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

'Merciful! well, it is more than I will be

to you, my fair lady—more than your precious Dick Haddon was, when he well nigh drove in the roof of my skull for knocking over a few miserable birds.'

Finding that she repelled him with a strength that astonished Sharkeigh and surprised even herself, he released Clarice for a moment, and eyed her gloomily, while standing between her and the open door, so as to preclude escape. Clarice moaned and covered her eyes with her hands, as if she would shut out her situation like some horrid unreality.

'Come, my beauty, this is all bosh,' said Sharkeigh. 'Are you like the ostriches on the karroo, that think if they hide their heads in the sands they can't be seen?'

Suddenly she looked upon him with her hands clasped, and wild entreaty in her eyes.

'Kill me if you will, Mark Sharkeigh,' she exclaimed, 'but for heaven's sake, and your own soul, degrade me not!'

'This is all stuff,' yelled Sharkeigh, gnashing his teeth in a wild way peculiar to himself; 'leave such twaddle to parsons and those who believe in them. I have been past redemption long since.'

'I am only a woman, weak and feeble; see, here is my throat, place your knife in that and end my misery.'

'And what about your sister, eh?'

'Oh, Fanny, my love! my darling! my sweet little sister!' said Clarice, in a sudden gust of keener misery and grief, as the loneliness and the future misery of Fanny came in fancy before her; but Sharkeigh had again seized her, and thrust her furiously among the bewildering heaps of maize and Indian straw.

There was a rushing sound in her ears, a numbness of the heart, a sickness of the soul seemed to come suddenly upon her, and all her strength passed away; but at that moment there rung in her ears a yell, or rather a succession of yells, that shook the rafters of the barn; musket shots were heard, the glow of flames rose in the kraal without, and felled like an ox by a blow from a knobkerrie, Mark Sharkeigh tumbled prone by her side.

Rough hands now seized Clarice. She was swiftly borne out into the courtyard of the now flaming kraal, to find herself a prisoner in the power of the Caffres.

CHAPTER IX.

So severe was the blow I had received from the war-club or musket-butt of the savage concealed in the tree, that even after consciousness returned to me, some minutes elapsed before I quite realised all the terrors of my situation, and it is strange that during that time I seemed to hear in my drowsy ear, with wonderful distinctness, a fancied voice—the voice of Clarice—cheering me, and urging me to take courage for her sake.

I was a prisoner in the hands of the Caffres. Consequently, I was a doomed man, as they invariably put their captives to a slow and frightful death, after cruelly and mortally mutilating them. Surrounded on all hands, weak, exhausted, and defenceless, I could but stagger up, and gaze despairingly about me.

With all the rapidity of thought there flashed upon my mind much that I had heard

of the torture—the fearfully ingenious torture —of prisoners by the Caffres, the lingering three days' crucifixion of many a helpless boor, and worse even than that, the fate of Colonel Mackinnon's party of the 45th Regiment, and of Mr. Hartung, the German bandmaster of the 74th Highlanders, who fell into their hands near Fort Beaufort.

All the memory of these horrors now made my blood run cold.

Morning was stealing through the tops of the forest trees, and as the tropical sun mounted skyward fast, the tide of light fell gradually from the highest leaves to the lower branches of the giant timber, and all the once gloomy wood became filled with radiance. The suikar-vogels, or sugar-birds, the golden cuckoos, spoonbills, and flamingoes, flew gaily from branch to branch, while baboons and monkeys sprang from tree to tree, chattering, grinning, and cracking nuts, or swinging by their tails, with heads downward in the air.

Most of the trees here were of the mimosa species, light and graceful in form, with feathery foliage of the brightest green, and golden clusters of globular blossoms, which

loaded the air with delightful perfume; but it is a tree rendered singular by the multitude of snow-white thorns, each six inches long, that stud every branch and twig.

Three or four assegais were launched at me, but luckily missed, and these javelins, which are identical with the zagairs which the Moors used of old in battle, stuck quivering in the green turf at my feet; but the Caffre who had found me was a chief, and evidently considering me as his property for the time, to keep or kill at leisure, he gave each of those who attempted to molest me a blow on the head with his knobkerrie, making a sound on their thick skulls like that produced by a hard bowler's ball on a cricket-bat.

I was dragged forward to a place where, under a larger tree, with their skins well smeared with red ochre, cicatrised for ornament, and shining in grease for utility in war, the Inkosi and Amapataki—*i.e.*, the chiefs and councillors — of the assembled tribes were arranging the division of a quantity of amazimba, or Caffre corn, which had been retaken from a party of the Fingo levies.

In the centre of these, with his face tied

up by a bloody cloth, showing that he had been recently wounded, presided a Caffre, arrayed with shield and sword, the kaross and cranes' feathers, and no less than three rows of tigers' teeth round his neck, together with some of the brass ornaments of the military bridle of Ensign Gill's horse, which had been shot under him in the Ecca Valley, when conveying the Cape Town mail with a rifle escort.

'My poor Clarice,' thought I, with a gush of agony, 'we shall never know each other's fate!'

I thought mine would soon be sealed, and gazed wearily and wistfully at the hordes that gathered round me in greedy anticipation of a scene of torture and bloodshed.

Giddy, half blind by the recent blow, and sick at heart, the whole scene appeared like a phantasmagoria.

Aware that our troops had retired past the stormed position to the camp in the valley below, the Caffres had no fear of molestation at that time, and in the crowds that swarmed about me there appeared something diabolical in their ferocity of aspect, their bloodsmeared

visages, their large white teeth, through which they hissed like snakes, while some who were in excellent humour at the prospect of making mincemeat of me, sang to themselves a guttural chant, and danced with a slow, jerking step to its monotonous notes, tapping the while with their glittering assegais on their shields of tough bullhide.

Before my fate came to be known I had the horror of beholding that of another sealed.

Dr. Hans Bruine Kasteel, of Cradock, the same kind old Dutch medical man who had attended me in my strange illness there, somehow had been taken prisoner; and having failed to cure one of the many daughters of Sandilli of some mysterious ailment, was now accused by the Umlanjeni, or witch doctors, of having cast a spell upon her.

'Mein Gott, mein Gott in himmel, Mynheer Richard!' exclaimed the poor doctor, wringing his trembling hands as he recognised me, though in the bushfighting uniform of the 74th Highlanders; but we were helpless to assist each other.

He gave me a glance that, like my own, was expressive only of hopelessness or despair,

and turned to the presiding Inkosi, whose head and face were partially hidden or muffled in a bloodstained cloth.

Like the other chiefs about him that personage was seated crosslegged, solemnly smoking the dagha pipe — a kind of primitive hookah, made of a bullock's horn, filled with a species of hemp in water, like the maddening and intoxicating *bang* of the Hindostanee. This they imbibed through a stem of reed, let into the side of the horn.

The hapless Dutchman, who spoke the somewhat musical language of the Caffres with fluency, now began with solemn earnestness to repeat again and again that he had done nothing to bewitch Mariqua, the daughter of the great chief Sandilli, but that he had successfully cured her of a fever, while in dread of his own life; that she was now perfectly well, and as a reward therefor he now prayed for his liberty.

I listened to all this anxiously, and while doing so could little foresee the trouble this identical damsel, Mariqua, was to prove to me, in the form of a—*wife*.

He urged his innocence and his claims to

gratitude in vain ; the witch doctors of the tribe, who had been jealous of his skill in the cure of one or two musket-shot wounds, were all powerful with the chiefs and councillors, so the work—the pleasure they deemed it—of torture and death speedily began.

I know not whether I ought to relate what I saw; but as it was the favourite mode of putting prisoners to death, and as I fully expected to perish by the same awful means, the scene made a deep and terrible impression on me; and yet, though face to face with it, my soul was with Clarice — Clarice, who seemed but a memory now, for our separation appeared a kind of anticipated death, which might be followed, alas! by no resurrection.

At a given signal at least a hundred willing hands were flung upon the miserable man. His clothes were rent from him, and he stood stripped in the sunshine, the whiteness of his skin forming as singular a contrast to the dark forms of his captors as his round and somewhat paunchy figure did to theirs, which were all bone, brawn, and muscle.

He was dragged to where a fire had been

lighted, and then thrown on the grass with his face to the sky, or rather, to the branches of the trees, which grew so densely overhead as to shut out the blue canopy above.

The Umlanjeni made a last demand that he would produce the 'bewitching powders, or show where they were concealed,' and he made a last appeal to the Creator of whom they knew nothing, that he was innocent of possessing any such thing.

I have often thought since that a little tact or art might have saved him, but terror had deprived him of both.

His hands and feet were bound to four strong pegs, which were driven into the ground, and a succession of the flat stones which had been heated in the adjacent fire till red hot were placed upon his body.

A shriek, which I sometimes hear in memory still, broke from the poor Dutchman when the first of these impromptu instruments of torture touched his tender skin; but so great was the agony he endured that moans—moans which gradually grew fainter and hoarser—alone escaped him, while the bead drops of profuse perspiration came rolling over

his forehead, and I turned away in utter horror of the scene, which lasted for nearly an hour. My heart gave a bound of relief when the report of a musket announced that he had been shot through the head by some savage who had grown weary of the protracted labour of torturing him, and perhaps wished to test my powers of endurance in the same fashion.

After what I had witnessed, the reader may imagine my emotions when the same terrible hands under which Bruine Kasteel had perished were roughly laid on me, and I was dragged closer to the Inkosi and councillors, who during all this episode of horror had been composedly sitting crosslegged, and smoking their dagha pipes.

My forage cap, a common regimental one, with the Scottish chequer round it, was now struck from my head by some mischievous or impatient fellow, whose assegai whistled close by me.

It was then, that on seeing my face fully, the presiding chief uttered a fierce guttural exclamation, expressive of astonishment, and stepping forward threw his well-oiled arms

about me, quite as much to my astonishment as to that of his followers.

He proved to be the great chief, Sandilli, whom I had saved from the claws of the tree tiger, and who now recognised and in gratitude protected me.

'My brother chiefs and amapataki,' he exclaimed, while brandishing his assegai over my head, in token that he would foster and guard me, 'he saved my life from a great and terrible leopard! Behold the marks of its teeth,' he added, showing the barely-healed laceration of his shoulder, 'and I shall save him now!'

'But if spared he will fight against us again,' urged one of the woolly-headed councillors.

'He shall fight against us no more,' said Sandilli, with a grin that showed all his teeth.

'How know you that?' asked others, with darkening looks.

'I have a reason,' said Sandilli, patting me on the shoulder, while an expression of indescribable cunning stole over his face, and he led me a little way apart from where the remains of the poor doctor were left, pegged

to the earth and mutilated, just as I have described them, with the greedy asvogels, or vultures, already flapping their black wings in the branches of the trees above.

When I thought of Clarice and Fanny Carysfort being in the hands of people such as these, I felt life almost valueless, though there was a great relief to my tortured mind in having escaped a death so terrible as that by which the doctor perished. Yet, strange as it may appear, I soon dismissed all thought of the unfortunate Dutchman; for when one is on active service the sense of danger and the actual value of human life, like sympathy for human suffering, grow less and less every day, from the mere circumstance of being hourly face to face with death.

On the same fire by which the fatal stones had been heated a large iron pot was filled with Caffre corn, boiling for the breakfast of the chiefs, and Sandilli invited me to share it with them; but I felt overpowered by thirst, after all I had undergone mentally and bodily, and preferred a bunch of honeypot grapes from the nearest bush, on which they were growing wild.

'Fear nothing now,' said Sandilli, 'you are not my prisoner but my friend rather, and as such shall be protected. He who saved the life of Sandilli must be as the brother of all the Koussie of the Amatolas.'

'A pleasant fraternity,' thought I, bowing an assent in silence; but he now proceeded to ask me a number of strange questions; and as he listened to my answers his large ears seemed to quiver like those of a staghound, uneasily and nervously at the same time.

He was surprised to find I spoke his native language with fluency. But the reason of the latter was speedily explained when more than one chief, with whom in quieter times I had bartered old muskets and ammunition, beads, buttons and knives for ivory, diamonds, and karosses, recognised in me the once-friendly trader.

'Have you a father or mother in your home beyond the sea?' asked Sandilli.

'I have neither, to rejoice for my return or to sorrow for my death.'

'They are dead?'

'Yes—years ago—dead.'

'That is well,' said Sandilli, smiling.

'Why, great chief?'

'Because you may with a lighter heart dwell among the Koussie.'

'Dwell here?' I repeated faintly.

'Yes. Remain with me, and I shall give you a wife to make your bosom glad, to hoe the maize for you, and cook for you in your kraal.'

My heart sank at this prospect, which seemed to indicate a troublesome captivity.

'Is it true,' asked one of the Inkosi, who proved to be Hermanus, a chief of the Gaika tribe, 'that the great chief of your nation is a woman?'

'Quite true,' said I.

And then all who heard me laughed with surprise and scorn.

'Are her flocks and herds as numerous as mine?' asked Sandilli proudly.

'Perhaps not.'

'Wah, wah!' cried all, clapping their hands and striking their shields at this admission of her Majesty's inferiority.

'Are her warriors and people as numerous?'

'More numerous by far.'

'How far so?'

'They are numerous as the leaves in the forest, or the blades of grass in the wild karroo.'

Utter disbelief was expressed on hearing this.

'Are they all brave, like the Tortoises?' (meaning the 74th) asked Sandilli after a pause.

'Yes, all.'

'It matters not—we shall fight them,' exclaimed the Gaika chief. 'What say you, Caffre warriors, shall we not again go forth and fight these feeble white men? Let us kill them all, even up to the slopes of the Table Mountain, and take captive their fair women and girls, making spoil of all they possess, until the last of them is driven into that accursed sea, by the aid of which they first came among us!'

'Wah, wah, wah!' cried a thousand savage voices, while the steel-headed assegais clattered on the shields of tough bulls' hide.

But when the clamour subsided, Sandilli shook his head with something of doubt and dejection in his air.

'Chiefs and councillors,' said he, 'the white sand never rises in clouds so high as when it is just on the eve of being crushed by a tempest of rain. So it may be with our people in this war against the white chief, who is a woman. A year or more may see us completely crushed. We shall fight many a battle ere that time of sorrow comes, yet we may fight in vain, for have we not already been sorely defeated, even here at the Amatolas? It was destined that we should be so, and if the armed tide of the white men must roll beyond even the banks of the Orange River, it is the will of the white man's God, and so His will be done,' said the poor savage, with a kind of piety that was completely unintentional.

The whole of Sandilli's force, which I have stated as being many thousands strong, now prepared to fall back towards the valley of the Water Kloof and the Heights of Kroome, leaving the remains of the doctor to their fate.

Not far from these an old Caffre, whose necklace of tigers' teeth—a kind of savage order of knighthood—showed that he was a brave fellow, lay dying, with three bayonet wounds in his bare brawny chest.

I attempted to place a bandage over these.

'Touch me not,' said he, spurning me scornfully. 'Go, go, and leave me to die in peace. Think you that an aged lion cares for the tending of the jackal?'

So he, too, was left to the beaks of the as-vogels, as the whole horde departed in a north-easterly direction, taking me with them.

All the chiefs were mounted, and Sandilli, in pursuance of his friendship for me, gave me the horse of Pitoi, son of Vonga, who had fallen in action with us during the previous day. Thus the hope of escape began to gather in my heart as we rode on, though every hour of that long and weary day added to the difficulty of the attempt by increasing the distance that lay between my friends and me.

CHAPTER X.

After many halts, doubts, delays, and again setting forth, Sandilli separated himself from his army, and with a few select mounted warriors escorted me to a remote part of the Amatola country, near the source of the Upper Keiskamma River, where, in a place called the Gulu Valley, stood the Wolf's Den, his own farm.

Near this were the luxuriant gardens of a chief named Sogu, famous—or rather infamous—in this war as the slayer of all the European military villagers of the neighbouring district.

The house was not unlike a snug boor's farm, and had probably once been such. It was furnished with a heterogeneous collection of furniture—ornaments and utensils plundered from many of the Dutch and English kraals that now lay in ruins elsewhere.

Here I found myself many miles—some hundreds, so far as I could reckon—from succour or means of information, deprived of a horse, of arms, and all means of escape, for a chosen party of Sandilli's men, some twenty in number, who were given to me ostensibly as an escort, proved in reality to be my watchful guards, and I was their prisoner.

Every movement of mine was watched by their stealthy black eyes, and every time I went near the stables where their horses were kept, near the garden of the kraal, or a great clump of bamboo-like reeds some thirty feet high which enclosed it on two sides—in short, if I crossed the threshold of the door, at least three of them attended me with musket, knife, and assegai, all of which they handled very significantly.

A week passed away thus, and as I was kept in total ignorance of the movements of our troops, who had marched to Somerset and made a night attack on the Heights of Kroome, I began to find my captivity as intolerable as the food with which I was supplied proved odious, notwithstanding my past experiences as a hunter and trader. There were the flesh

of the porcupine roasted in hot wood ashes in his skin—minus the quills of course—jerked elephant, tough wild boar steaks, and so forth; but with plenty of Cape smoke wine, however.

Even in my own room, which was furnished with an ample but old-fashioned Dutch bed, having a heavy wooden frame laced across with strips of cowhide, and which proved a very comfortable couch to a campaigner, I knew that I was watched, as the woolly head and glittering assegai of a Caffre sentinel were always visible from the window outside all night long.

Sandilli, whom I had not seen for an entire week, now came to visit me, and reminding him of the service I had done him, I begged that he would restore me to liberty—give me a musket, a few rounds of ammunition, a horse, and permit me to depart. Knowing forest life as I did, I had no fear of making my way alone to General Somerset's force.

But Sandilli shook his head, and was grave and even stern in his manner, for during the week he had been absent from the Gulu Valley the Caffres suffered severely when the 74th Highlanders attacked the Water Kloof

Heights, and matters were looking gloomy along the whole frontier, so the wily old savage chief was less than ever disposed to part with me, or to abandon his schemes.

Relinquishing for the time all hope of bending him to my views, I then implored him to discover, if possible, the fate of two white women who were in the hands of his people, or those of Mark Graaff, I knew not which.

'Two white women were carried off by him from a Dutch lager village, aided by some of the Cape Corps.'

''Tis they!' I exclaimed.

'And they are now at his kraal among the mountains,' continued Sandilli.

'Do you know the place?' I asked eagerly.

'Perfectly.'

'Is it far from here?'

'Many Dutch miles. But what then?' asked Sandilli, frowning, while adjusting his dagha pipe.

'I could reach them if the men of Macomo or the thievish Amapondas don't anticipate me.'

'And if the men of Sandilli will permit you.'

'You will surely aid me in saving them?' I urged.

'I shall make no promises. But tell me—is one of those pale-faced amapazi your wife, or are both your wives?'

'No,' I replied, and though on the point of telling him that Clarice was to have been my wife, and would be so if heaven spared us, the recollection of his views concerning me inspired me with caution and reserve.

'Then are they your sisters?'

'No.'

'Then why this interest in them?'

'They are friends—very dear friends.'

'Nothing more?'

'Nothing more.'

'I am glad that neither of them is the wife of my friend.'

He patted my shoulder as he spoke.

'Why?'

'Because, as I told you in the forest, I mean to provide you with a wife from among ourselves.'

I could not feign sufficient gratitude for the matrimonial prospect held out to me. When I thought of the Caffre women and

Bechuana belles, whom I had seen with their dingy skins smeared in grease and powdered with iron ore, that sparkled like mica—their woolly hair adorned with metallic pendules, and their sole attire a leather apron and a kaross of hide, my mind filled with horror and disgust, combined with anger, at the intense absurdity of my whole position. And yet it was a serious one, for in the end it might be 'marry or die.'

Nevertheless, I was compelled to dissemble, for the keen, quick eyes of the suspicious savage were fixed upon me with something of stern yet mocking scrutiny, and he haughtily shook the two pinions of the gray crane which adorned the fillet, or species of torque, which was round his head, as he resumed—

'You shall marry my daughter Mariqua, who is of half Griqua blood, and in beauty she looks a whole one, for the women of the Griquas are, as I need not tell you, more handsome than the women of the Caffres.'

Still the prospect was not an alluring one; but I could only bow in silence. The idea occurred to me of asserting that I had a wife already at home; but that would not have

made the slightest difference to Sandilli. But I must own to feeling considerably scared by all this, as I soon began to see through the schemes of the chief, who had two cogent reasons for wishing a civilised husband for his youngest daughter—to wit, one whose interest might both save and serve him, if, as he greatly feared, the tide of war turned against the insurgent Caffres.

'You shall have a daughter of mine for your wife,' continued Sandilli proudly. 'Mariqua was to have been the bride of Pitoi, the son of Vonga, but he was slain by the Tortoises. You saved the life of her father, and for that good deed she shall have you, with all her heart obey you, and shed brightness around your kraal. Forty stately horses and a thousand cattle shall be her dowry, with uncounted spoil to be taken in the war we are waging.'

It is probable that among this spoil Sandilli mentally included the mess plate, baggage, and big drum of the 74th Regiment—indeed, he hinted as much, but still failed to excite my gratitude.

Then, as if the subject was settled and dis-

missed, he threw aside his kaross, which was made from the skin of a black-maned lion, profusely ornamented with beads and scarlet fringes, and seating himself in an easy chair, wherein whilom some fat boor had been wont to doze and enjoy his postprandial meerschaum, he proceeded to inhale the intoxicating fumes of hemp-seed from his dagha pipe.

My whole situation greatly bewildered me.

I was a helpless prisoner in Sandilli's hands, and that his daughter would marry me in spite of myself I never doubted. The faces of the 74th, of the 91st, of Clarice and her sister, came before me in memory, and I thought of the wonder and amazement of all Europeans when they came to hear of the event —Dick Haddon and his squaw.

How could I rid myself of this odious Mariqua?—how save Clarice Haywood?—how escape this absurd and dangerous thraldom? Besides, my sable bride might have a lover, whose poisoned assegai, launched by a jealous and unerring hand from behind some rock or bush, might soon make an end of me.

I sighed bitterly with grief, impatience, and anger, though the soothing reflection did

occur to me at times, that fifty, yea, perhaps, twenty years hence, it would be all one, and a small patch of grass would cover all my sorrows and me.

CHAPTER XI.

I LOVED Clarice so truly that this passion made me nervously gentle, tender, and true, and full of fears for how fate would deal with us, and how all would end.

My cravings to escape, and, if possible, to succour her, were intense; but to escape with success a horse and arms were necessary—the latter, at least, imperatively so. The means of procuring both were sedulously denied me; yet I hoped, by dissembling, in the end to obtain both.

After long consultation with myself, and finding that Sandilli was inexorable in his resolution to detain me—a resolution which, if I proved very refractory, he might readily change for the more cruel one of destroying me—I resolved to temporise with him, and to dissemble with the artful savage, as the only

means of saving my life, and regaining my liberty.

Moreover, he seemed very impatient to have his absurd matrimonial scheme carried out at once, as he was in haste to take the field personally against us once more, for our troops were pressing onward, and to have me despatched further—more hopelessly as it seemed—into the interior of the country.

Somehow, unhappily for myself, he seemed to view me as a kind of hostage, with whom he feared to part.

'I want neither your horses nor your thousand head of cattle. If I marry your daughter it shall be without these bribes,' said I, when he was urging this matter for perhaps the hundredth time upon me.

'Agreed; but how will you stock your kraal?'

'With my own hands, if you will but arm me. I shall fight the Tronkvolk of Mark Graaff, and the plundering Amapondas.'

'But you will be the friend of the Amatola Caffres?'

'Yes,' said I, gulping down my intense repugnance.

'Good—wah, wah!' cried the savage chief, as he patted my shoulder; 'but in lieu of the fine horses and the fat cattle—'

'I shall ask you to do me a favour.'

'And the favour once done, you will marry my little daughter Mariqua?'

'Yes,' said I, making a very wry face indeed, as I thought of the dark skin, the woolly head, the greased limbs, and tiger-tooth necklaces of my sable intended, for whom I was to jilt my beautiful and delicate Clarice.

'Then name the favour.'

'You will free and bring hither the two white ladies who are in the hands of Mark Graaff.'

'I shall free them willingly, but I shall not bring them here to the Gulu Valley.'

'Why?'

'You shall neither see nor meet them.'

'Why do you decide thus?' I asked, with irrepressible anxiety.

'I have my reasons,' replied Sandilli, with a louring brow. 'These women will be pale as the flowers of the mimosa, and Mariqua is dark, like the girls of the Koussie.'

From this remark, I could plainly see that

he feared my intended might suffer by comparison.

'If I free those women,' added the wily Sandilli, after a pause, 'I shall give them as wives or spoil to two of our young Inkosi.'

My blood curdled at this proposition, as I knew but too well that if they had already escaped maltreatment at the hands of the bushrangers, they would next be cast on the mercy of savages who had neither pity nor scruple—the Inkosi of the Caffres.

'This must not be,' said I resolutely.

'What if Sandilli wills it?' was the haughty question.

'They must be rescued, and sent in safety to the nearest British camp or lager village, otherwise I shall not marry your daughter. I shall refuse your friendship and alliance, and shall seek only to escape, even at the risk of being cut to pieces, joint by joint.'

'And if I do as you propose—save and send them to their friends—what proof am I to give you of having done so?'

'A letter—even the tiniest scrap of paper—written by either of the ladies will suffice as proof.'

I struck my hands despairingly together as I spoke, for how I yearned, craved, and longed for the sight of a single word pencilled ever so hastily by the beloved hand of Clarice is known only to heaven and myself.

'Wah, wah, it shall be done.'

'When?'

'Immediately.'

'May I go with you?' I asked pleadingly.

'No.'

'Oh, Sandilli, in gratitude for saving you from death!'

'For that good deed I shall not permit you to risk your life. Sandilli has warriors enough and to spare, and this night shall see the torch planted in the kraal of Mark Graaff.'

'This night,' thought I. 'Then they are nearer this place than I supposed. Oh, Clarice, Clarice! how great is all this misery—how agonising the suspense. Would that I could fly to you!'

On the flyleaf of an old Dutch book which had been brought in with other plunder—it was Hugo de Groot's 'History of Holland,' I remember—I wrote an explanatory note to Clarice, entreating her to send a reply as soon

as she found herself and her sister rescued and in safe hands; adding, that I prayed heaven to bless and protect her and Fanny, that I was a captive with Sandilli in the Gulu Valley, and that, unless rescued by General Somerset, as yet I saw no means of escape—in short, my captivity was to be the price of their liberation. I shrank from the shame and absurdity of stating exactly the views of the politic Sandilli.

As soon as this document was written, torn from the volume, and folded, it was given to Sandilli, who about mid-day departed with a party of chosen Caffres, chiefly on horseback, leaving me under the close guard of another select band; and, indeed, I was plainly told by him that any attempt to escape would only ensure death at their hands.

I looked with deep interest and anxiety on his departing troop. I never thought a time would come when I should again regard the Caffres with a friendly eye; but these men were going to free Clarice Haywood, and a picturesque and striking-looking band they were, with their karosses of black fur, their bare, supple limbs, their wild, gleaming eyes, and

jangling necklaces of teeth and metal beads, their round shields, assegais, and muskets, while the gray cranes' feathers worn by some, starting erectly up over each ear, imparted something of the diabolical to the general *tout ensemble*, by the resemblance they bore to Satanic horns.

Slowly passed the day after their departure. I had no idea of attempting an escape at that precise time, as I was intensely anxious to learn the result of this expedition against Mark Sharkeigh's kraal; and had I attempted to leave the house there were the usual woolly-headed wretches, with their too ready weapons, posted all about me.

I looked round, however, for a weapon—a knife, pistol, or anything which might serve me on an emergency—but looked in vain; the wily Sandilli had carefully removed everything of such a nature beyond my reach. No arms were there, save those in the hands of his own people.

Wearily passed the day, and I watched the shadows falling eastward across the Gulu Valley, as the red sunlight died away from the peaks of the gray cliffs and the grassy

mountains which overlook it. Herds of beautiful antelopes swept across it at times on their way from wood to wood, and the cry of the wild pintado came ever and anon from amid the prickly pears which grew there in groves eight or ten feet in height.

Near the kraal of Sandilli were lovely groves, where the citrons, oranges, lemons, and shaddocks grew in countless thousands, bending the branches to the earth; and these groves were watched by little slave boys of the Fingo tribe, who are employed thus by the Caffres to protect the fruit from monkeys, just as our farmers at home have their corn guarded from the crows.

The keen anxiety, the long tension of an overwrought nervous system for days past, since the loss of Clarice, the storming of the Amatolas, and above all, my recent adventures, were telling upon me now; and though I was in a fever of impatience to learn the result of Sandilli's raid upon Sharkeigh's premises, I could not resist the feeling of utter prostration that was stealing over me.

I obtained and quaffed off a bumper of Cape smoke, dashed with brandy, and then,

throwing myself upon my bed, sank into profound slumber.

During the entire night I must have remained thus, for the morning of the next day was somewhat advanced when I awoke, with a strange and confused conviction that I had slept but a short time—had only a nap, in fact, and that it was evening still. But it was the morning light I saw; the shadows seemed to linger still in the lovely Gulu Valley; but they fell from east to west, for they were made by the rising and not by the setting sun.

I felt stiff and chilly, though some friendly hand had spread a soft and warm kaross over me in the night. A sound caused me to look up, and I saw seated on the edge of the bed a handsome native girl of very prepossessing aspect, who was very leisurely fanning herself with a tuft of snow-white ostrich feathers, and watching me from time to time with a cunning twinkle—almost a leer—in her glossy and somewhat voluptuous-looking dark eyes.

She placed in my hand two pencilled notes, and a cry of joy escaped me when perceiving that one was from Clarice and the other from Douglas.

The first ran thus:—

'My Own Darling Dick,—When just about to die, I was saved by whom think you? Sandilli! The kraal was in flames, but dear Fanny and I were taken away by him, and are now safe with a party of the Fingo levy under Gerard Douglas, of all men in the world, and Lieutenant Bonteine, of the 74th. Save for the terror we have undergone, we are quite well, and little Fanny has counted wearily enough the days of our captivity on her white fingers. The Caffre wretches stole her wedding ring.' (If poor Carysfort is gone, thought I, Douglas will soon repair that loss.) 'But oh, where are you to receive this, my darling, my own love? Where and when are we to meet again? I must close in haste, as Sandilli's messenger waits, and Douglas is compelled to march at once.'

Such was the substance of her beloved note, which I read and kissed again and again, greatly to the astonishment of its deliverer.

'Man never is but always to be blest,' thought I. 'Where, when, and how shall we

meet again, Clarice? Well may your heart make the inquiry. Shall I ever escape all these toils, and win you as my wife in a peaceful and happy home?'

Then, as I remembered the odious resolution of Sandilli, a malediction escaped me, and I started into a sitting position; but again lay down to peruse the note for the twentieth time, during which the native girl was attentively surveying me.

'So Sandilli makes my marriage with his daughter the price of the sisters' safety among the Europeans,' I pondered. 'Well, he has kept his promise, and I must keep mine. So that they are safe, what matters my sacrifice for a time—it can only be for a time, surely? Ere long I shall get arms, and escape on the first opportunity. I can but die in the attempt.'

The sight of Clarice's well-known handwriting, announcing that she and Fanny were safe—safe at last in our own lines—with the brief expression of her love and alarm for me, made me loathe Sandilli and his project; yet he had my pledge and promise.

The note of Douglas, after his astonish-

ment and joy to hear that I was still alive, and apparently uninjured, went on—

'Carysfort—poor fellow!—has been given over by the doctor. If Fanny becomes a widow I shall certainly propose to her after a fitting time. I love her dearly; yet if she refuses, or even marries another, I shall not die of a broken heart: a man can have that feeling but once in his life.'

How was I ever to explain the absurd cause of my detention without exposing myself to the ridicule of the troops, of all Europeans, and to the astonishment and grief of Clarice?

What if some chattering Hottentot prisoner—and such were taken daily—told the real story, that I was to be, or was already, the son-in-law of the great rebel Caffre, Sandilli?

'Are you a Caffre?' I asked, now surveying the tawny girl with some interest, for her skin was not much darker than that of some Italian girls, and her hair was long and silky.

'My mother was a Griqua.'

'And your father?'

'Sandilli, the great chief,' said she proudly.

'And you—you?' I gasped.

'Am Mariqua, the girl who is to marry you,' she replied, while, with a waggery almost European, she swept my face with her fan of ostrich feathers.

'Good heavens!' I exclaimed, and I sprang to my feet in earnest now.

CHAPTER XII.

I SCARCELY know how to narrate the strange events that must fill this chapter up, unless I drop some of the links in my chequered story.

My thoughts were with Clarice Haywood, who, although saved at last, was yet quite lost to me. If I was ever to escape and rejoin her, arms and a fleet horse were absolutely necessary; and to procure these I must dissemble, and foil the savage in his own wily fashion.

'It is a perilous doctrine that temptation of itself palliates an offence,' and yet there is much to consider on this point in all temptations and offences.

The girl thrust upon me by the Caffre chief was all and every way unlike the kind of woman I had, to my own disgust and horror, conjured up — a Caffre *belle*, with hooked nose and negro lips, her skin anointed

with grease and sibilo, or iron ore, that sparkled in the sun, her woolly hair plaited into cords, and adorned by metal pendules, her attire an apron cut into thongs, a kaross of skin, and moccasins.

All unlike a creature of this kind, the girl whom I now saw was of mixed race—the daughter of a Griquà mother, whose tribe was descended from the old original Dutch colonists of South Africa on one side and the aborigines on the other, a tribe occupying the Orange River territory, which is larger than Great Britain.

She had the indescribable grace and ease of carriage peculiar to the women of Caffraria and the Fingoes; but in this girl much of the Dutch blood predominated. Probably she was not more than sixteen years of age; but in that tropical region she was considered a woman. Her figure was faultlessly beautiful, and a dress, which consisted of a low corset of scarlet stuff, and a double skirt of scarlet on green, barely reaching to below the knee, a kaross of black fur edged with scarlet, and a profusion of beads, displayed fully enough of it. For one of a mixed race, her skin was

wonderfully fair—fair almost, as I have said, as that of an Italian girl of the dusky type.

Her finely-tapered arms were bare, and her delicate little feet were encased in embroidered shoes, that were too complete to be termed sandals, and joined her beaded moccasins.

There was much of European regularity in her face, which was singularly sweet in expression, though the lips were somewhat full and red; her eyes were large and dark, soft as those of a gazelle, and full of lustre. Though the headdress of the Griqua girls generally consists of two brightly-coloured silk handkerchiefs, her head was bare, and her tresses, which were long, rather silky, and of the deepest jet, were braided round in heavy coils, interwoven with bright metal beads.

Amid the beads at her neck was one formed from the root of a bush that grows by the Orange River, and which possesses a sweet and peculiar perfume.

Under her smooth, clear, olive skin I could see the hot southern blood mantling in her cheek, as I surveyed her with a mingled expression of face indeed.

My situation was a very embarrassing one, to say the least of it; for my Griqua beauty was quite as much a 'girl of the period' as her fairer sisters elsewhere, and, like them in taste, was very much disposed to lionise and idolise me as a distinguished foreigner—more than all, perhaps, from the northern mixture in her blood, as a pure European.

Something of a genuine blush blended with the tender smile that filled her face, when placing upon my arm two hands, which, though very brown, were small, and so beautifully formed that a sculptor would have doted on them, she said:

'You will not hate, but learn to love me in time, though the people of my father are at war with yours?'

'I shall never hate you, be assured of that,' said I gently, while I placed the letters of Clarice and Douglas in the pocket of my now tattered blouse; 'but what will my people say if I return to them no more?'

'Does it matter to us what they say?'

'*Us?*' I queried, feeling myself as if already adopted.

'Yes—to you and to me; besides, as the

witch-doctors have predicted, my father is a great chief, and he will drive all your wicked people from the land of the Koussie.'

I shook my head, and almost smiled.

'And you have forsaken them to come and live with us?'

'I have forsaken them to come and dwell with you,' said I gallantly, making almost a wry face nevertheless, while she took my hand between her own and covered it with kisses.

The entire situation was fast becoming bewildering—awkward to the last degree. I felt myself an 'engaged man,' here as well as elsewhere; but here in spite of my teeth!

After a pause she resumed:

'How many gods have you? As the Umlajeni will tell you, we have but the sun and the wind to worship.'

'We have but one.'

'So I have heard the Orange River missionaries say.'

'You have heard them preach?'

'Yes, in the language of the Griquas; and you will marry me in their faith?'

'This is too much,' I exclaimed impatiently, and turned away, feeling for a time

thoroughly annoyed, for the daughter seemed to be even 'longer headed' than the father.

'Do not be offended with me,' said she, caressing my neck; 'the poor Griqua girl does so love and worship her white lord.'

'Love me, do you say? Why you have only known me five minutes—if you can understand what five minutes are.'

'I have watched by your bed since the sun rose above the mountains; and while watching thus I have learned—'

'What?'

'To love you.'

'Impossible! You can't know what love is.'

Her large eyes filled with a strange light, and she said half petulantly:

'I am not used to be contradicted; and I have said that I love you.'

'Why?'

'Because you looked pale, and weary, and sad; you sighed often in your sleep; you dreamt.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because you uttered a word, or a name; I know not which.'

'Clarice?'

'Yes, that was the sound. You murmured it many times. Then your lips quivered, and a tear left your eye—a tear which I kissed away.'

'You?'

'Yes; but so softly, so gently, that you never felt me nor awoke.'

'By Jove!' thought I, 'all this is becoming too much of a good thing.'

'I shall often watch you so,' said she, with a soft smile.

'When?'

'When we are married,' was the cool reply.

'If I am to marry you, Mariqua, it must be in the fashion of your own tribe—as a Caffre, if I am to become one.'

'But I am a Griqua,' said she coldly, and half turning her olive-tinted shoulder to me.

The girl was pouting, and very prettily too.

'Your husband should have a horse—a fleet horse—and such arms as become a man, a warrior,' said I, reverting to my ever-present thought and desire.

'He shall have both, and everything becoming the Inkosi—the husband of Sandilli's daughter.'

'The husband of Mariqua,' said I insinuatingly.

'The husband, lord, and lover of the Griqua girl,' she added, patting my cheeks with her hands, and placing her pretty mouth in very close proximity to mine; but I was not prepared to bestow even upon her the caresses which I deemed the property of my absent Clarice, so I drew back.

'Heavens!' thought I, while gazing on her as she clung to me in a manner that, if bewildering, was, to say the least of it, not unpleasant; 'is it possible that a being so innocent and artless is really a barbarian—a pagan—a Caffre, ignorant of the death she must die, and when dead, after the fashion of her people, no other grave than the maws of the vultures and jackals?'

For a moment I thought I would endeavour to teach her, and train her mind; but, sunk in densest darkness as she was, the task seemed a vain one.

'But the horse and arms, a musket and

hatchet, Mariqua?' said I, toying a little with her, in the hope that, before matters proceeded too far, I might obtain from her, or through her influence, what I required, and then 'be off without beat of drum.'

'You shall have all—the fleet horse of Pitoi, the son of Vonga, a musket, and a sharp hatchet too.'

'But when—when?' I asked impatiently.

'When we are married,' said she, coyly and prettily, as she dropped her head on my shoulder.

'Wah—wah—wah!' said approvingly a voice with which I was now unpleasantly familiar, and Sandilli, with his black kaross and crane's feathers, a dagha pipe in one hand and a bundle of bloodstained assegais in the other, stood before me, a most unpromising-looking father-in-law, who had been regarding the scene with approbation, and with the air of one who would have no trifling with his daughter's 'young affections.'

The grin on his sardonic visage, the fierce hook of his nose, the cicatrised ornamentation of his skin, the row of white teeth he showed, and the glistening of his fierce dark eyes, with

the effect of the two crane's feathers, reminded me somehow of Mephistopheles in the opera of *Faust.*

His sudden appearance—his evident satisfaction at the rapid progress of matters—his entire bearing, which seemed to say, 'I have fulfilled my part of our contract, and now look for the fulfilment of yours,' greatly alarmed and exasperated me.

The sudden and absurd love of the girl I might soothe or tolerate; but there would be no baffling old Sandilli.

Proud of having a white lover, the girl was as determined to keep possession of me as he was. So from her I could have but small hope of assistance, unless I played my part well, like that of the 'gay young knight who loved and rode away.'

Then I was not without fears of her vengeance if I treated her with indifference or neglect, and especially that of her father, if she complained to him, for he would have thought no more of poking his assegai into me than into a pumpkin.

Though Mariqua was in many respects a mere savage, she was so gentle, trusting, and

artless, that I was not without some remorse of conscience for playing the part I did ; yet it was forced upon me by circumstances beyond my control, and to have attempted any explanation to her, or temporising with her father, would only have insured his wrath, which was prompt enough at all times, and very probably led to my being broiled between red-hot stones, like the poor Dutch doctor.

I was full of supreme joy to feel assured of the safety of Clarice Haywood. I was burning with desire to achieve my liberty and rejoin her; but only hoped to do either by falling apparently into the plans of my captors.

Every moment I perused and reperused her little note this longing grew stronger on me, and yet days and even weeks were stealing away. The words of it seemed to be the utterance of her own lips, and brought her sweet and highbred presence more vividly before me; but ere long the soft pencilling became almost effaced and the fragment of paper frayed, yet I treasured it with all a lover's tenderness.

I obtained some days' delay by feigning an illness; but this was done in vain. The witch-doctors were summoned from all quarters—those odious, cruel, and cunning Umlanjeni, at the thought of whom my blood ran cold—and, dreading a consultation with them, I consented to do anything Sandilli required of me, and so a great gathering of savages was convened in a Gulu valley on a lovely evening in August, and the Wolf's den—the home-farm of Sandilli—became a scene of noisy whooping, yelling, and rejoicing, amid which I felt that I cut a perilous and absurd figure that filled my heart with anger and mortification.

The ceremony was simple enough, and consisted chiefly in the tying of a piece of the dried chitterling from some wild animal round the slender throat of the girl.

I was attired in a headdress of fur, like one of those which our troops found in such numbers in the royal Gaika kraal on the Amatolas, a kaross of tiger skin—like the crane's feathers, a badge of chieftainship—was placed upon my shoulders, and an assegai was put in my hand. I grasped it with stern joy. It

seemed to be my first instalment, perhaps, of liberty—my guide to Clarice Haywood.

Around us the odious Umlanjeni performed many strange and satanic-like capers and incantations, and all the men present, to the number of thousands—wretches who would with joy have slain me, had such been the behest of their leaders—whooped and danced like fiends, striking their shields of hide and brandishing their assegais to a wild chorus, in obedience to Sandilli, and making a horrible medley of sound.

There was a feast, at which all kinds of animals, wild and tame, were devoured with great relish, and plenty of Cape wine and Dutch beer, plundered from lonely kraals and open villages, was drunk from vessels made of the shells of ostrich eggs and land tortoises.

The atmosphere was sickeningly redolent of the fumes from thousands of dagha pipes full of damp hempseed.

The scene around me was utterly bewildering. The bad wine, of which I had partaken rather freely, to drown care and desperation, together with the intoxicating effect of the

dagha pipes, made me feel as one in a dream, and I could scarcely reply to Sandilli when, after the abominable hubbub was over, he proposed to depart to his camp, which was situated I knew not where, as he and all about me took especial care to keep me entirely in the dark as to the movements of the Caffres and of our troops.

'I shall expect my dear son—the husband of Mariqua—to begin soon the proper duties of a gallant Caffre chief,' said he, with a strange leer in his eye.

'In what way?' I asked rather sulkily.

'By leading my people against the white men—those accursed tortoises in particular—and by teaching us their art in war.'

'Agreed; but I must have a horse and arms.'

Sandilli eyed me keenly and doubtfully.

'In time you shall have both,' he said, after a pause.

'So am I always told; but when?'

'When I return to take you with me to the field.'

'What if I should refuse?'

His eyes shot fire, and the grasp of his

mahogany-like hand tightened on his assegai; but he said quietly—

'My son will know better than to do that.'

'If I fight, Sandilli, it shall be in the van,' said I, feeling that I was not improving matters at present, and that my best chance of escape—if not shot down by our own people—would be in getting as far to the front as possible.

'Wah, wah, wah!' said he approvingly.

'And if I fall—'

'Who, then, will love poor Mariqua?' said the girl, as she wound her soft brown arms affectionately round me.

I shivered as she spoke, for I felt all the dark falsehood of my present position.

At last the uproarious and savage sounds died away, the Caffres departed, all save twenty, who were posted in and about the kraal as a guard, under Vonga, the father of the slain Pitoi, an old and savage chief; and after a time we were left alone—Mariqua and I.

And now came the most troublesome part of the task my evil fate had assigned me—to

play the part of the lover in earnest, when I was yearning only to escape and be at liberty in the wild forest or on the distant mountains, open and free—to be with one I might never see again.

Under the effects of all I had undergone I felt my brain reeling; yet a cool and delicious breeze, laden with the rich perfume of the orange and citron groves without, came through the half-open windows of the room, which was the best in the kraal, and had actually Venetian blinds. The walls were covered with French paper, representing Hindoo girls, brilliantly attired, Bayadères, and girls dancing; and to my disordered vision the room became at times as if peopled by phantoms.

Seated a little way apart from me, Mariqua was eyeing me by the light of an oil lamp, that streamed and spluttered in the currents of the night wind.

'You are thinking more of a horse and arms than of me!' said she, with tender reproach.

'Why do you think so?' I asked, feeling the necessity for saying something.

'Because I see it in your face. Your spirit is elsewhere.'

'I must have a very tell-tale face, Mariqua.'

'Oh, why is this? Would you really leave me?'

I made no reply, for I was not unwilling that she should think so.

'Oh, do not leave your poor Griqua girl! She will destroy herself if you do. I am yours —yours. Do with me as you please, even to taking my life; but do not leave me.'

And now she clung to me wildly and passionately.

Tears choked her utterance. She had torn off and cast aside, as if weary and petulant, the brilliant flowers and ornaments with which the women of the tribe had decorated her; and her long, dark hair, which looked almost blue when the lamplight struck it, fell in dishevelled masses over her polished but olive-tinted neck and shoulders. The poor girl looked very beautiful in her grief and love, and I must own that for a time she fairly vanquished me, though never for a moment shaking the yearning desire to be gone—to place miles between herself and me.

My position was full of growing danger. In one of her nature, the love and grief of Mariqua might readily and easily turn to rage and hate.

I drained a cup of wine which she gave me, and then the room seemed to swim round me, the walls to vibrate, and all the dancers, Hindoos, Bayadères, Almé, and Bacchantes to whirl in mazes about us.

'Promise that you will never leave me, nor seek to return to your own people, or if you do that you will take me with you.' Strange entreaties, thought I, for a girl to make on what she deemed to be her wedding day. 'Tell me that you will love me—love me ever and always. But you are silent; you sigh and look away,' she continued, after a pause, while her eyes began to glow, and drawing back, with her hands on my shoulders, she seemed to look into my very soul.

'Mariqua, why ask all this of me—just now especially?' I murmured, not very well knowing what to say, while seating her beside me on the couch, I endeavoured to calm her, and to soothe her fears for the time.

'I ask you a question, and you reply by

asking another,' she said in a low sad voice, as she rested her head on my shoulder, and I was left thus, with the graceful Griqua girl, my savage bride, clinging to me, imploring me not to leave her, beseeching me never to leave her, in her soft and most musical, yet at times deep and guttural language, for that she loved me, and me only.

CHAPTER XIII.

While I was a prisoner, and in ignorance of all that passed beyond the sequestered mountain kraal in which the artful Sandilli kept me, neither his people nor our troops had been idle. John Bull's money was not being spent in vain.

A standing camp had been formed by the general at a place named Reit Fontein, from whence patrols and escorts went out daily. Some of these were under Douglas, Bonteine, Graves, and other special friends, who were not without hope of finding or succouring me ; while light infantry drill, cooking indifferent rations, and patching tattered uniforms, occupied the spare hours of those who remained behind.

To one of those patrol parties, composed of the Fingo Levy, were Clarice Haywood and her sister delivered by an escort of Fingo

prisoners, liberated for that purpose by Sandilli; and the unexpected arrival of the ladies at the standing camp caused a very general feeling of rejoicing among the troops; but the mystery attending my residence or detention was increased by the hand I had in procuring their liberty, and caused a constant speculation among the 74th, in whose memory the fate of their bandmaster, Hartung, and of several others, who had unhappily fallen alive into the hands of the Caffres, was yet fresh.

The discovery of the charred remains of the unfortunate Dr. Bruine Kasteel, by a patrol party under Sergeant Robert Burns, of the 74th, put an end to all conjecture for a time, as they were supposed to be mine, for my forage cap was found on the ground close by; and Douglas, with great delicacy and tact, continued, for a time at least, to keep all knowledge of this terrible suspicion from Clarice and her sister, who, attended by a party of armed volunteers, boors, and Fingoes, set out for the village where Major Carysfort was still hovering between life and death.

General Somerset soon gave old Sandilli plenty of work, and hence I was spared the

infliction of his presence. With a detachment of the 74th Highlanders, and another of the Cape Corps, Somerset scoured all the district of Hell Port and the Zum Bergen Mountains, which lie between the province now bearing his own name, and that of Uitenhagen; and on the 30th of August, about the very time Sandilli left me in the Gulu Valley, he attacked the Caffres on the bank of the New Year River, where they had a strong position in a difficult and rugged kloof, and then he dispersed them with great slaughter, capturing one hundred and sixty horses and cattle.

Two days afterwards, the 2d, or Queen's Regiment, which had just arrived in the colony, and been marched to the front, had a smart brush with his people elsewhere, and routed them with considerable loss; but in the wild bush, near the Fish River, a party of the 2d was completely cut off. The captain fell mortally wounded, while fifty-seven of his men were killed or maimed.

The 74th attacked Macomo on the heights of Kromme.

Mounted on a beautiful white charger, at the head of three hundred picked Caffre horse-

men, who seemed as a body guard to accompany him everywhere, this daring chief made himself conspicuous over all the field, and with his own hand dismounted Colonel Fordyce, of the Highlanders, by shooting his horse under him; but the heights were carried at the point of the bayonet, after a terrible hand-to-hand conflict, in which the supple and well-greased Caffre had, in too many instances, an advantage over the belted and heavily-accoutred soldier of the line. 'Our gallant fellows fought most bravely,' wrote an officer. 'One man, with an assegai deeply buried between his shoulders, singled out its owner, and shot him dead, while the weapon was nearly protruding through his chest. One grenadier killed four Caffres with his own hand.'

The storming of the Water Kloof by five or six battalions of the line caused a considerable panic among the Caffre leaders, and by order of Sandilli I was conveyed, with Mariqua, far away from the Gulu Valley, to a place many miles—some two hundred or so—northward—a change of locality that added to my anxiety for the future, as it greatly increased the difficulty of escape.

Vonga and his twenty horsemen took possession of the only house that survived in what was once a peaceful and flourishing Moravian missionary station, the name of which I never learned. The others had evidently been but recently destroyed by fire, after being, no doubt, completely pillaged, and the flights of vultures hovering over particular places in an adjacent cane-brake seemed to indicate that in those spots lay the bodies of the dead unburied.

In the upper story he placed Mariqua and myself. The lower he appropriated to his men and their horses. I had not yet procured the long-coveted arms, and even the assegai had been taken from me by Vonga; but I had, by a lucky chance, become proprietor of a small hatchet, and a package containing forty rounds of rifle ammunition, with percussion caps; and these I secreted under an old Dutch cabinet which stood in a corner of my sleeping room.

I examined this new locality with a keen eye. Northward and eastward of the ruined station rose grand and towering cliffs of basaltic rock, from whence sloped banks of the greenest and smoothest grass.

Southward and westward—the way I must pursue if ever I escaped — stretched a vast plain, dotted by groves of trees. The country for many miles was unpleasantly open for a fugitive; but I soon became aware that, deeming me sufficiently secure by the great distance to which they had conveyed me, Vonga and his men relaxed much of their vigilance, and there seldom passed a night on which I could not have escaped with ease, but for want of a horse and arms.

Without the latter, wherewith to feed myself, and defend me against man and beast, in such a country I was helpless as a child.

On the morning after that wild orgie which I have striven to describe in the last chapter, I felt only mortification and compunction for the part I had been compelled to play, and the way I had deceived Mariqua.

I would have fled from her, and from myself; but I was a prisoner in the hands of the remorseless Vonga, and had to remain with her and my remorse, like Ixion on his wheel.

'Oh, Clarice — Clarice Haywood!' I exclaimed, and struck my hands together in passionate grief.

By the endearments I had been obliged to lavish on her, I had deluded the poor Griqua maid into trusting as well as loving me. Was I the pure and earnest lover the high-bred English girl thought me—the *preux chevalier* that Douglas and Fanny deemed me?

It seemed to me that I was only protracting my life at the expense of my honour, and so my mental misery increased as the weeks of October stole wearily away.

In the end, however, I began to have a brotherly feeling for my gentle savage—never a warmer one; yet she filled me with an undefinable fear, for I knew that if once abandoned, in her wild despair she would kill herself or me, or both, if she had an opportunity. I grew ennuyed and sick of her hourly presence, though she was thankful if I permitted her to kiss even my hand, which she used to do with a bearing of respect and love that mingled gracefully with pride.

In my moments of sadness and reflection, the poor girl would often ask me, tenderly and lovingly, in her strange, soft language—

'Of what are you thinking?'

'Why do you ask?'

'You are so very sad and silent—well, of what?'

'Of you,' I would reply, and then feel shame for the flattering falsehood that brought a flush of joy to her olive cheek, and a strange light in her soft and beautiful eyes.

I was not, however, such a bad fellow as I then believed myself to be. Times there were when I thought of speaking to her of religion —of endeavouring to teach her something of the Trinity, and of the God of the Christians; but how was I to plunge into the mystery of theological metaphysics? and how bring before an ignorant and unlettered girl such holy puzzles as those which bewilder and set by the ears the most learned in the land?

I shrunk from the task. Besides, was it not better to leave her in ignorance than by enlightening her seek to confound and disgrace myself?

Great terror I had of the return of Sandilli. I knew the odious and perilous tasks he would expect me to perform, and so felt a growing anxiety for a speedy departure. Thus I panted with an emotion of clamorous alarm in my heart to be gone.

After the arrival of the 12th, or East Suffolk Regiment, from the Mauritius, and the victorious affair of the Water Kloof—though I knew nothing of it—mounted Caffres arrived frequently with messages from Sandilli to Vonga. Great events were evidently on the *tapis*, and the ferocious old savage who had me in custody now viewed me with such peculiar aversion and malignity, that I felt certain our arms were proving successful, and knew that, but for the protection of Sandilli and the presence of Mariqua, he would soon have made short work with me.

One morning — oh, I shall never, never forget it!—about daybreak, a deserter from the Cape Mounted Rifle Regiment—Jan Cupido, one of the same rascals who assisted Mark Sharkeigh in the abduction of Clarice and her sister—arrived at the missionary station with a message for Vonga. Whence he had come, or whether about me, I know not; but his message, or tidings, whatever they were, seemed to excite the greatest interest among my Caffre gaolers.

His horse he had left at the gate, accoutred and bridled, with his double-barrelled regi-

mental rifle hanging in its usual place by a bucket and sling, to the right side of the saddle. Here was a golden opportunity, and not a moment to be lost.

I looked at Mariqua; she was sound asleep on a couch of skins. Her olive cheek was resting on her tapered olive arm—her long lashes seemed sealed over her eyes. Poor thing! she looked very innocent, with a pet fawn antelope nestling beside her. Dark though she was, Mariqua was indeed beautiful, and some there are who might have loved her. I gave her a farewell glance; for an instant an emotion of compunction came over me. The next saw me secure my ammunition and the hatchet, with which I was resolved to cleave to the teeth the first Caffre who discovered or opposed me.

Opening the window softly, I slipped outside, and dropped lightly to the ground—a fall of only seven feet or so. A gap in the hedge of prickly pears and geraniums, forming the compound of the house, favoured my further exit, and while I panted rather than breathed, I crept round to where the horse stood pawing the earth, impatient of a feed.

My blood seemed to boil and my veins to tingle, so great was my excitement as I seized the double bridle, sprang upon his back, and though without spurs, urged the well-trained animal to a furious gallop, I knew not and cared not in what direction, so that I placed a comfortable distance—some odds at least—between myself and the men of old Vonga.

But I had scarcely ridden two hundred yards before I heard a wild and wailing cry. It was the voice of Mariqua, and a pang shot through my heart as I recalled how often she had threatened to destroy herself if she was ever abandoned by me; but her voice —if she raised it again—was drowned in the fiend-like yells of others, as the men of Vonga rushed like furies to their arms and horses.

At last I was armed, mounted, at liberty, and free to make a struggle man to man for the life that heaven had given me.

CHAPTER XIV.

The memory of Bruine Kasteel's fate, and a terror of being subjected to something similar, added wings to my flight, and keenness to my despair at the thought of being retaken. Compunction for leaving my mock wife I had now none. I rode on, on, blindly on, though the Cape Rifle horse was far from fresh; but to lighten the weight he carried, I cut off and threw away the valise of his late proprietor, taking care to drop it into a pool of water, lest, if found, it might serve to indicate my track.

This was perhaps a useless precaution, as the country was so open that for a time I was distinctly visible to those who were now leaving the Moravian station in hot haste, with horse, and spear, and musket, to pursue me.

I rode on blindly, longing for shelter and the friendly obscurity of night; but the time

as yet was only sunrise, and I had a long and too probably a perilous day before me.

I had the start of my pursuers by a few miles, but their horses were fresh from the stall, while mine was weary, and I knew that the Caffres would follow any track or trail I left with deadly instinct and unwearying tenacity.

I reached the cover of a thick grove of trees—chestnuts and mimosas—and made the horse pursue for more than a mile the bed of a runnel that traversed the road, so that all trace of his hoofs—my trail—should be broken off. Unbitting him then, I knee-haltered him, relaxed the saddle-girth, and slinging the rifle over my shoulder, clambered into a thick tree at some distance, there to conceal myself in case of the thicket being, as I expected, surrounded and searched. In that case, I had resolved to permit the horse to be taken without resistance, and would be only too happy if I escaped undiscovered on my perch.

High up among the branches I should be quite unseen, and from thence could see around me and below. The life I had led for some years past as a trader with the Caffres,

and a complete knowledge of their character, made me leave no precaution untried to baffle them.

On examining the rifle, both barrels proved to be loaded and capped; thus, I had two shots more than my forty rounds, which I now took from their paper wrappers and prepared for service. They were luckily Government ammunition, and suited exactly the regimental rifle of the sable Jan Cupido.

How wildly beat my heart as I sat perched up there among the green foliage and yellow flowers of a great mimosa, listening intently to every sound, and every moment expecting to see the ferocious Caffres—led by old Vonga, hissing through their white teeth, and yelling like unchained demons—come crashing among the trees at full speed, with musket and assegai; and I could imagine the whoop of triumph and exultation with which they would greet the discovery of my haltered horse, and the close investigation of the vicinity that would at once be instituted.

But all remained still, most solemnly still. I heard only the wild beating of my heart and the chattering of an occasional monkey, who

doubtless wondered at my adoption of his habits, and invasion of his sylvan retreat.

As the time passed on, and noon drew nigh, I was pleased to find, by the direction in which the shadows fell, that I had, by a fortunate chance, in the first energy of flight, taken the proper direction towards the south-west. To aid my lonely steps, I had now no pocket compass, as in the days when I had my waggon and team to inspann for the road and outspann when we halted.

I passed the entire day without food. I felt only thirst, for the excitement and anxiety I endured were great. The runnel gurgled sweetly and pleasantly below the tree in which I sat—cool it looked, and most inviting, as its current glided smoothly over the brown pebbles, and under the broad green leaves, the yellow gourds, the scarlet flowers, and long, reedy grass that bordered it; but I dared not yet descend to quench my thirst.

A zebra came to drink—a large and beautifully streaked one—and I envied the long, deep draught the animal took, till suddenly his eye caught sight of my saddled horse that was grazing near, and then he fled from the spot.

In an adjacent tree I could see that a colony of bees had lodged themselves, and I longed for some of their spoil—the honey—but had no means of smoking them out. With some dry grass I could soon have done so; but to fire it would have cost me a ball cartridge, and lack of that cartridge in some future contingency might cost me my life.

Evening drew on—the evening of an interminable day as it seemed to me; but I endured all with patience and hope, trusting that this was but the fortunate beginning of a happy end; and thinking over the two lines from 'Macbeth' with which I had often consoled myself in those perilous times, and have already quoted:—

'Come what—come may,
Time and the hour run through the roughest day!'

So the lagging hours passed on, the shadows grew deeper in the leafy grove, and I ventured to leave my lofty perch at last.

While laving my face and head in the runnel I drank as the thirsty alone can drink. I then rubbed down the horse with tufts of dry karoo grass; the animal was fresh now after a long day of rest. I looked carefully to

his trappings—to bridle, girths, and stirrup-leathers; slung my rifle to the saddle, and mounting, set forth, guided only by the last amber flush of day that lingered in the west beyond the undulating range of hills, which at the end of the plain rose opaquely against the light, like the dark blue waves of a petrified sea.

All night I rode towards those hills, and saw them rising in magnitude before me. Over the wild karoo I traversed herds of antelopes were scouring; once or twice a pair of giant ostriches, a flock of bustards, and a covey of partridges passed me; but nothing hostile was visible under the clear bright stars of the Southern Cross, and my ear could detect no sound of hoofs, though I sometimes dismounted, and placed my face close to the ground to listen.

I rode hopefully on, and as yet without any desire for food or sleep, and without much sensation of weariness; but I knew that food and slumber, too, would become pressing necessities on the morrow, and when and how could I provide a meal without using my rifle, and thereby summoning I knew not what

enemy from the nearest thicket or kloof, even in the wilderness?

As pale daybreak began to steal in, and cast my shadow before me, the green waste was seen to be spangled with flowers, and studded here and there by the lovely acacia, the gaudy yellow blossoms of which are the favourite of the giraffe. They loaded the air with perfume.

The sun was rising when I found myself entering a narrow ravine that seemed to form the beginning of a pass through the mountains. There was also the appearance of a kind of pathway, or track, which had long been neglected, for creepers had overgrown it.

As day brightened I became anxious for a shelter and place wherein I might sleep for a few hours in safety from Caffres, and those wild animals with which the country abounds. One side of the kloof, or ravine, was covered densely by forest trees, on the other rose great masses of gray basaltic rock, in which I perceived several fissures; so my plans were formed at once.

In the forest I unbitted and knee-haltered my horse as before, concealing the saddle in a

tree. Then, rifle in hand, I proceeded to ascend the cliffs in search of a secure place for shelter and in the hope of finding some wild birds' eggs.

Over detached blocks, which had fallen in masses from the summits above, I clambered on my hands and knees, and saw that what had appeared from a distance to be a fissure was a regular cavern, having a narrow entrance, but widening within.

A pang of alarm came into my breast, and instinctively I cocked both locks of my rifle, on perceiving the face of the cliff about the entrance was all starred and scored by bullets, thus indicating that an attack and defence of some recent inmates had taken place.

I shouted and then concealed myself, expecting instantly to see the woolly head and gleaming eyes of an armed Caffre, or the thick curly pate of some hunted boor or bushranger appear; but, save the echoes of my voice, no sound responded. Encouraged by this I resumed the ascent, and ere long found myself in a very curious and well-concealed retreat, below the brow of a gloomy and impending cliff, from the verge of which there hung thou-

sands of baboon-ropes and brilliant trailers, forming a green and natural fringe.

The smooth faces of the rocks within the cavern were covered with Bushman paintings or frescoes, not unlike those which are found on Egyptian tombs; in the most brilliant colours—red, blue, black and white—were representations of the chase. Men on horseback and on foot, armed with bows, war-clubs and assegais, were seen in pursuit of uncouth figures that were meant for the gemsbok, the koodoo, and the elephant, with many other designs which the wild Bushmen are said to have worshipped of old.

These I merely glanced at casually, being more excited and interested by traces of more recent inhabitants, in the shape of some embers, scarcely cold, a cooking-place of stones, some fruit, vegetables, and Caffre corn that lay near, and three brace of fine plump partridges, recently shot. Besides, there was a regularly-formed bed of dry leaves in a corner.

Whoever they were, the proprietors of these affairs were absent at present; but they might return at any moment, and much too soon for my purpose.

If fugitive Europeans, they might materially assist me in my ultimate escape. If hostile Caffres or Amaponda thieves, my fate might soon be sealed if they found me in their den. But the mode in which the partridges were plucked and hung upon a cleft stick, and the manner in which the vegetables had also been prepared, made me almost certain that the place had been occupied very recently by Europeans; so I resolved to watch and wait.

I clambered into a dry and cosy nook, a little way farther up the rocks, where some bushes of the scarlet and pink-leaved geranium, which grew in every cleft and crevice, completely concealed me, with my rifle carefully capped and cocked by my side, and the sharp little hatchet close at hand. I found a shelf of rock that formed a pillow, and then, worn out by all I had undergone—by want of food and rest—I sank into a profound slumber.

Yet it was not so profound but that I had dreams of Clarice Haywood, in her pure white beauty, of her voice so tender and love-laden, of Walcot Tower and the Cheviot Hills, and

of old Haddonrig in the sweet season of summer, when the drowsy hum of flies and bees came, with fragrance of the garden flowers, through every open window.

When I awoke all was dark; the moon, red and fiery, yet on the wane, seemed to linger above the black peak of a mountain, while the clouds, like torn veils of crape, were swept past her face by the gusty wind, imparting a weird aspect to the scenery, nearly all of which was sunk in sombre obscurity.

Far down below, the kloof and wood in which I had left my horse were buried in utter blackness. For a moment I could scarcely remember where I was or how I came to be there.

Was it the fragment of some distempered dream that out of all this there seemed to come before me the soft dark face and black upbraiding eyes of the Griqua girl from whom I was flying?

'But can I sacrifice my liberty for her?' thought I. 'Bah! the little savage will soon become consoled.'

Yet the thoughts of Mariqua were not to be so easily thrust aside.

I now heard the sound of voices near me. What was the language spoken I could not determine; but the red wavering glow of a fire now shone from the mouth of the cavern I had lately explored. Its recent tenants had returned or others now were there.

Judging by the position of the stars and the sinking moon, midnight was past and day-break could not be far off, and now was the time to satisfy myself as to who these people were—if friends, to join them; if foes, to creep down to the thicket in the kloof, mount, and be off westward with all speed.

I carried the hatchet in my teeth, and, rifle in hand, crept out of my rocky alcove. Drawing near the mouth of the cavern, I peeped in.

The odour of the broiling partridges came pleasantly towards me from a fire of wood, the red flames of which lit up, with quaint grotesquerie, the garish Bushman frescoes on the walls of rock, so that the figures seemed to start forth to the eye, to move and waver like a shaken tape stry.

Near the fire were seated two men, dressed in the usual colonial fashion, with round jack-

ets, yellow 'cracker' trousers and mocassins of fur, with Fingo hats and feathers.

Both were armed with gun and knife. One, a Hottentot, was busily superintending the cooking; the other, a white man of great size and personal strength, apparently, reclined on the bed of leaves.

He groaned heavily at times, as if in pain. He seemed pale and weary, and his right leg, which was bound up by strips of raw hide, was evidently wounded, for it appeared powerless, broken, and covered with blood.

I entered the cavern, rifle in hand. The sufferer, with the air and eye of one who cared little now whether he met friend or foe, looked up from his bed of leaves, and I found myself face to face—with whom?

Mark Sharkeigh, *alias* Graaff, the Bush-ranger, the fugitive convict, the subtle and revengeful wretch who, in concert with an awful hypocrite, had defrauded me of my birthright, and consequently, as yet, of Clarice Haywood!

CHAPTER XV.

Mark Sharkeigh he proved to be indeed, and his comrade was my quondam knecht and follower, Adrian Africander, the thief, deserter, and rebel. So I had suddenly lighted upon pleasant company.

On recognising me, Africander made a wild spring towards his rifle, which lay on the ground near the fire; but I was too quick for him. Adroitly placing my foot on it, I thrust him back furiously, by charging him breast high with mine, and with all my force. He grew peagreen with terror, and reeled against the rocky wall of the cavern, exclaiming, in his Cape gibberish—

'Ya, ya, Almachtig! Dat is he—my groote Baas Reichardt! Shoot, shoot, Baas Mark, or, mi scapsils! (*i.e.* my stars) he will make an end of us.'

'Was there ever such a confounded old

duffer, to let himself be disarmed; but I'll settle his hash if I can,' cried Sharkeigh, writhing himself into a sitting position, and true to his first and natural impulses, attempting to cock his gun with the intention of shooting me.

But he fell back powerless, unable to lift or level it; so I instantly snatched it from him, and then both men were before me, defenceless save their knives, which one was incapable of using, and the other was afraid to do so.

'Shoot, shoot!' cried Adrian Africander, in growing confusion and dismay.

'Silence, you traitor and thief,' I exclaimed; 'as I have no jambok here I shall talk to you by and by; but I must first confer with this greater villain.'

Then, with great deliberation, I smashed both their rifles, breaking each at the small part of the butt.

The wounded outlaw, from his bed of leaves, glared at me for a time like a veritable wild beast. His eyes were suffused with blood; the hairs of his vast and untrimmed beard seemed to bristle with the nervous excitement,

which led him fatuously to open and shut his huge and clumsy hands. Then he clasped them and groaned deeply, for he felt that all was over with him now. He was frightfully pale, for he had evidently lost much blood, and had endured great agony.

I afterwards learned that, on escaping from his kraal on the night it was (for Clarice) so opportunely attacked by Sandilli, he had made his way with Adrian Africander to this Bushman's cavern or temple.

On the preceding evening this retreat had been discovered and attacked by Vonga's people when in pursuit of me, and the fight had ensued to fill up their time. The worthy pair had escaped to the forest in the kloof; they had been fired at there, and Mark was wounded—had his right thighbone 'smashed to pieces in the skrimmage,' as he said.

And now it would seem that he had crawled back here but to die; for his blood was in such a state of fever and ferment by the excesses of his past life that mortification was already setting in.

'Ha!' he exclaimed, through his clenched teeth, as he surveyed me with an indescrib-

able glance. 'So, as we say in the bush, "you have got the right snake by the tail at last."'

'It would seem so,' said I, while leaning on my rifle, and surveying with wonder and disgust the now crippled wretch on whom Death had put his icy fingers. 'You are a snake, a serpent, indeed.'

'We have met before, Captain Haddon,' said he, 'and now we meet for the last time. I have not forgotten, though I now forgive, the precious tap on the head you gave me in that scuffle with old Bagshot in Teviotdale. My first idea—it's nature, I suppose—was to pot you; but my second is to die without another crime.'

'That is well,' said I. 'You will, I hope, bring your terrible life to a decent close.'

'My life has indeed been terrible,' said he bitterly, and in a trembling voice; 'but who thrust that life upon me—or rather, who thrust me upon the bad career with which you taunt me?'

'Your own evil propensities.'

'Not so, but your uncle, old Hab, of Haddonrig, who again and again had me convicted

and locked up among felons and thieves as a poacher, till I grew in time to be a thief and a felon myself. Who put me in the Castle of Jedburgh, even as a boy—a halfling bairn—for stealing pheasant eggs for my sick mother, and for picking sticks out of his park fence for her little fire in winter? Who, but old Hab of Haddonrig! This was but the result of your cursed game law—a law made by the rich for the temptation and oppression of the poor. Then I grew to be a man, and I shot everything that came in my way, and made many a clean sweep of the preserves, as you know. Next I was on the turf, as you know, too, Master Dick,' continued the miserable creature, becoming more colloquial as his voice grew weaker, while he reclined against the side of the cavern with half-closed eyes. 'Yes, on the turf for a while, and soon got the name of a blackleg, though I was on pretty equal terms with the best in the land, for the turf of the racecourse, like the turf of the cold kirkyard, levels all distinctions. Many a tip I took from those who lost, and many more from those who won, till I grew weary of being a regular rascal, and betaking me to my

gun again, became once more an honest poacher.'

'Honest!'

'Yes, honest, Dick Haddon, for the birds of the air and earth belong to no man, howsomever old Haddonrig may have thought.'

His lips seemed to be baked with fever, so I handed him an ostrich egg filled with water from a spring that gurgled down the rocks, and he gave me a glance expressive of surprise, and also of as much gratitude as his ferocious visage could assume.

'I little thought, even in sore extremity like this, to get even a drop of water from your hand, Dick Haddon. I tried to do you wrong many times when I came upon your trail in the bush; but that is all past and gone now—past and gone.' He moaned heavily and then added: 'I thank God now that the girls got off free, as I have heard—old Toby of Walcot's daughters, I mean. Yes, I am indeed thankful for that, now that I find myself lying here!'

There was a pause; after which I said:

'You had your chances at home in the old country—chances like other men—and might

have become respectable, had you lived industriously and quietly.'

'Respectable and industrious! Ah, ha! What chance of being either one or t'other has a returned transport, a ticket-of-leave man, whom every prowling detective or rural policeman, whose sweetheart mayhap you fancy, may talk about you, and say to your employer, "Look out, don't trust him?" So a fellow such as I had never the ghost of a chance for doing good, Captain Haddon. Had I risen to be an elder in the kirk, the taint would stick to me, and the taunt be given. So I was best off where the waves and winds cast me, here in the wild bush, with all men's hands against me, and mine against all men.'

'And in this terrible spirit you could actually assassinate your harmless countrymen—private soldiers who never injured you—poor fellows in our native tartan, too!'

'What does it matter that they were so?' he growled. 'Those same countrymen had hunted me and others like wild beasts from bush to rock, and from rock to tree, for many months, and thus I only shot those who would have shot me. It was my life against their

lives, that was all! And yet, and yet—' His voice died away, and his nether lip quivered convulsively, and in a changed voice he said: 'My mother lies in Kelso kirkyard, by the old abbey wall, far, far away, where I shall never lie. Oh, happy, happy dead!'

'You wrong yourself, poor wretch,' said I. 'The lees of some good are in you yet.'

'Do you think so, Master Dick? Perhaps the devil is never so black as he is painted, though Heaven knows I have been bad enough and black enough in my time; but law made me so.'

'No doubt it was very impertinent of the law to punish your peccadilloes.'

'Don't sneer at a dying man, Captain Haddon, a rascal though he be. Some day—to-morrow, to-night, perhaps—if Sandilli or Vonga get upon our trail, you may lie, as I now lie, face to face with Heaven. Yes,' he added, in a low, solemn, and wailing voice, choked with sobs, 'face to face with Heaven.'

He turned his haggard eyes as he spoke to the bright evening sky.

I threw some dry branches on the fire, and drawing forth a brace of the broiled partridges,

rent them asunder, and offered a piece to Sharkeigh; but he turned from it as if with loathing. I was starving for lack of food, feeling faint, in fact, and so appeased my own hunger; but during this interval, or while I had been stooping over the sufferer, Adrian Africander would seem to have stolen out of the cavern unperceived by either of us.

'You know the trick that old Prue Grubb and I played you after Halbert Haddon's death?' said he, after a pause.

'Too well—but too well. It ruined me; cost me my commission, and the loss of one who was dearer to me than a thousand commissions. It made me a wanderer on the face of the earth. Mark Sharkeigh, if ever one man revenged himself for a mere blow, dealt in a scuffle, you have had a terrible revenge on me!'

'I shall make amends ere it be too late.'

'How?'

'By writing a full confession of the plot.'

'And your share in it?'

'Yes, a signed confession.'

'But without witnesses of trust, what will it avail me?'

'Heaven will witness it!' cried the miserable creature, with a strange burst of fervour. 'My signature is in the books of Jedburgh Castle more than once. Let those who doubt it compare my signed confession with the documents there.'

'But paper, pens, ink—we are without them. Surely your mind wanders?'

'It does not. There is an ammunition wrapper. Make me a pen with your knife, and I'll soon find suitable ink.'

I smoothed out a piece of brown paper that lay near — cartridges had once been wrapped in it—and with my knife cut him a pen of a quill from a wild bird's pinion, for many lay strewed there.

With hands that trembled a little, he laid the paper upon the crown of his broad hat, which he placed before him as a desk, and deliberately dipping the pen into a black pool of his own blood, which lay in a crevice of the cavern floor, he proceeded to write out a brief but clear confession of the conspiracy which the Scottish courts of law had failed to clear up—the plot by which he and an artful hypocrite had defrauded me of my lawful inherit-

ance, and brought about the fatal blight that fell upon Clarice and me, as I have already detailed in the earlier chapters of my story.

I watched him attentively as he wrote on, with long pauses at times, either to choose words, or because he was faint and weak.

At last he signed it with the last effort of a bold hand, and gave it to me. Legally it might, nay would certainly, be worthless; yet it was a link in my history, and thanking him for it, I placed it where I carried the tattered letter of Clarice.

Now all the strength seemed to pass out of Mark Sharkeigh, and his head sank heavily against the wall of rock. I thought the man was gone. I felt his pulse, and it was beating still. I placed the shell of water to his lips; he drank some, and reviving a little, looked hurriedly about him.

'Where is Africander?' he asked huskily.

'Gone—stolen away,' said I, now missing that sable rascal for the first time, so fully had my thoughts been occupied.

'Gone where?' asked Sharkeigh, with some asperity of manner.

'I know not.'

'But I know,' exclaimed the other, with new energy; 'it is to betray you.'

'To whom? Vonga?' said I, starting.

'No; oh, no.'

'To whom, then?'

'Some Amapondas and rebel Hottentots, who are encamped in the bush about three miles distant.'

'Are you sure of this?'

'I have not a doubt of it. Adrian Africander is capable of anything.'

'Yet no master could be kinder to a servant than I for years have been to him. The ungrateful dog!'

'So now begone, I implore you, Captain Haddon. You have been kind to me—have forgiven me, perhaps,' said he, in a broken voice; 'and I would not have you caught and butchered here, as these Caffre devils alone know how to torture. Away; you have not a moment to lose.'

'And you?'

'Leave me to die in peace. Man can do nothing for me now—nothing; perhaps not even give me a grave.'

Here was a dilemma for which I was by

no means prepared. I was certainly not under such obligations to this man that I should watch by his deathbed at the risk of my own life. The latter I knew would be instantly sacrificed the moment Africander returned with this horde of Amaponda Caffres at his back. I resolved at once to quit the cavern, and at all events, while there was yet time, seek the shelter of the thicket in the kloof. After a space I might return, and before finally setting off to cross the mountains, pay a farewell visit to the dying sinner.

I said something of this to Sharkeigh, and he seemed deeply grateful to me. I then seized my rifle and hatchet, and quitted the Bushman's temple. The sufferer seemed then to be sinking into a kind of trance, for his eyes were closed, his head reclined against the hard rock, and he seemed neither to hear nor see my departure.

All that had passed seemed like a dream to me, as I went plunging down the rough rocky face of the slope, and reached unseen, as I hoped, the thicket where my horse had passed the night. The saddle, wet with dew, was soon girthed on, and I now thought that

while all remained quiet in this locality it would be wiser in me to get out of it at once, as the wood would in all likelihood be searched for me.

I mounted and set forth, after a careful reconnaissance, but I had barely got into the open portion of the kloof when I saw behind me a mounted band, consisting of many horsemen.

They seemed about two miles distant, and by the sudden quickening of their speed and change of direction to be undoubtedly in pursuit of me.

CHAPTER XVI.

By his mode of riding, and the round white jacket which he wore, I knew one of those horsemen to be Adrian Africander.

In this new pressing danger I nearly forgot all about the poor, despairing sinner who lay dying in yonder cavern, incapable almost of fashioning a prayer with his pallid lips to that Maker before whom he was so soon to appear, for his fate might soon be sealed if any wild animal came that way and scented the blood of his wounded limb.

Galloping onward into the wooded kloof between the mountain slopes, I was not without hope of distancing these pursuers altogether, or, at least, of successfully eluding them, and getting by a *détour* in their rear amid the thin morning mist, which was now curling upward, white as snow in the golden sunshine, from every hollow place.

My horse was in tolerable order, but a good feed of corn would have given it more

mettle than the grazing had done, and thus I soon became aware that I barely preserved the distance between myself and the Amaponda Caffres, who were alike fleetly and well mounted. Indeed, ere long, by the sounds that the wind brought towards me, I became painfully conscious that they were gaining on me, and that unless I found concealment or succour they would ultimately ride me down. Succour was hopeless, and concealment I could find none.

The hot morning sun soon exhaled the mist upward, the kloof became more open and destitute of trees. I soon left it, and the mountains, too, behind, and for miles there stretched before me another karoo, or plain, covered by long grass and aromatic shrubs, by wild lilies and tulips of wondrous beauty, but no shelter, unless a green ridge, some hundred feet in height, which rose in the midst of it, could afford it; and that did not seem very probable.

Each time I gave a hurried glance behind, I could see that the figures of the men and horses were becoming more and more distinct as they neared me, and ere long their cries of

triumph came plainly to my ear. Flight seemed useless; yet life is precious—oh, most precious in such a time—so I continued to ride blindly and breathlessly on.

'This day,' thought I, 'may—nay, too probably must—see me perish by a miserable and obscure death in the desert—a death of which Clarice can never, never know. I shall disappear—be mourned for a time, and then —forgot.'

The horsemen saw the ridge that rose before me, and, very naturally supposing that I must ride round it to the right or the left, they opened out, and rode in extended order, so that some should be close to my skirts if I took either way. But before I could determine what to do a final and unexpected catastrophe occurred to me.

The ridge in question consisted of high gray crags of basaltic rock, that rose perpendicularly from a green and sloping bank, which was thickly covered by dead pine trees. These stood up all bare and white, denuded of bark, like skeletons, presenting a singular and ghastly appearance, as their leafless stems and branches glistened in the sunshine.

As I was nearing this place, a cry, or gasp, escaped me, and in a moment I found myself rolling prostrate on the ground. My horse had put his foot into a hole, and falling headlong forward, threw me, at the same time breaking the off foreleg just above the fetlock.

The animal was totally useless now, and my life I deemed as lost. Half stunned, I scrambled up and secured my rifle and hatchet. The poor horse was making ineffectual struggles to rise and get afoot, but always rolled heavily over on his side, moaning and whinnying most plaintively. I could not shoot him to end his misery, not having a cartridge to spare, and so I had to leave him to the vultures or wild animals. These I knew would soon end his sufferings by devouring him.

The yell with which my ferocious pursuers greeted this catastrophe acted as a spur upon me. I resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible, and began the ascent of the ridge on foot with all speed, seeking to reach a chasm or cleft in the rocks, where I might defend myself till my last cartridge was expended.

'To cover—to cover!' said I, aloud, in my

excitement. 'To cover while there is yet time, Dick Haddon,' for I had acquired a habit of communing with myself when alone.

This rocky ridge was about two hundred feet in height, and in form and aspect closely resembled the well-known craigs of Salisbury which overhang the city of Edinburgh. Through the intertwisted branches of the dead pines—which were of great size and age—over the rough stone and long karoo grass that covered the slope, I scrambled upward, and ere long found myself at the base of the basaltic cliffs, just about the time when the foremost of the Caffres had dismounted at the bottom of the slope, and was haltering his horse to a skeleton tree.

The cleft, or chasm, was a natural split in the rocks, about six feet broad, but of great depth—some thirty feet or so, and open at the top—a point which could not be reached in any way, as the basaltic cliffs ascended sheer upwards, and even impended a little. Behind, the rock was totally impracticable of ascent, as it rose sheer like a wall from the karoo, or rather from the grove of dead trees; so I could neither be assailed in rear or on the

flank, and for a defence to the front I now bent all my energies.

Including Adrian Africander, my pursuers were four and twenty in number, armed with assegais and muskets. That they had not already used the latter—as I had long been within range—surprised me; but it soon became apparent that they were without ammunition.

Retiring into the chasm, I proceeded in breathless haste to pile across its narrowest part a barricade of loose stones about three feet high, and I had barely achieved its formation when a yell pierced my ears, and the woolly head, the white teeth and gleaming eyes, of a dusky Amaponda Caffre appeared at the lower end of my fortress.

There was a whizzing sound, and launched with deadly force, an iron-headed assegai came crash on the rocks beside me. As he was raising his arm to hurl another, I fired, aiming low, for the life lies low in a Caffre, as we say in the bush. He suddenly stooped to elude the ball, which consequently pierced his brain, and the dusky savage, after bounding convulsively into the air, fell crashing among

the trees below, dead as a stone, while I instantly reloaded, and resolved never to empty both barrels at once, if I could avoid doing so.

Oh, what a yell was that which now rose into the clear welkin—a yell fierce and savage as the hot passions which roused it, and seemed to pierce my ears, and make my heart tingle.

'Ha!' muttered I, through my clenched teeth, 'let the women of the Amapondas count their slain and weep, slain by the white man, alone, unfriended, unaided, and well nigh defenceless! Curse them! curse them! the cold-blooded, cruel, and unrelenting savages—more cruel even than the lion and leopard of their native forests.'

Another and another Caffre bounded up and launched his assegai; but the fate of the first rendered them cautious, and dreading my fire, they were too quick in appearing and disappearing to launch their weapons with anything like precision. But I saw with increased anxiety and alarm that the assegais of these Amapondas were unusually formidable, being fully six feet long, with iron spear-heads one-fourth of that length inserted into the shaft, and all too evidently poisoned.

I know that for this purpose they used a subtle and deadly combination of animal, vegetable, and mineral poisons, procured from the cobra di capella and puff adder, from the roots of a species of cactus, and from copper ore. I knew too well that if wounded by one of these —even by the most trifling puncture—I was a dead man!

All remained quiet for a time, till there rang a triple yell.

Three Caffres abreast sprang up at the end of the chasm, and launching their assegais, were about to rush on me, covered by their shields, and armed with their knobkerries or war clubs, but they jostled each other, and when I fired again, the bullet killed one and wounded another, who, making a clutch at the kaross of his third comrade, they all tumbled down the rocks together.

'I have still twenty at least against me,' thought I, while reloading the right barrel again; but I had barely done this when another assailant came, whose weapon was a pistol, the ball from which splintered on the stones of my barricade, and so great were the haste, the terror, and confusion of the marks-

man, that he fell forward into the chasm and hurt himself severely.

'Ach Almichtig! verdamte Bergschotten!' he exclaimed. 'Come on, come on, he's here!'

He was Adrian Africander.

A glow of vengeance came into my heart when I remembered all the kindness I had for years bestowed upon him, who now pursued me almost to death. I lodged the contents of my left barrel fairly in his body, and after writhing for a time in great agony he expired.

Now that blood had been shed these savages would never relinquish the attack so long as one of them remained to avenge the last who fell.

Once more the savage yells pierced the sky, as a fifth Caffre fell, shot through the breast, from whence the blood almost spouted over me as though from a syringe; and I heard his body go crashing among the dry branches far down below.

This occurred about midday, and then another, drunk with hempseed—maddened for the purpose, apparently—came bounding in the chasm, armed with a knife and war-

club. My bullet, short though the distance, glanced obliquely on his shield of rhinoceros hide, and only caused him to stagger; but, ere he could recover himself, I thrust one of the poisoned assegais into his body, and hurled him with my foot into the profundity below.

After this, more than an hour passed without my being molested again, and all remained quiet. I heard only their voices at times, but could make out nothing of what they intended to do. By their continued presence, however, it was evident that they had not relinquished the attack.

Were they waiting quietly to starve me into a surrender, or were they deliberately making some chosen man or men drunk with hempseed, to rush with mad courage on their doom and me?

The shadows began to fall eastward. I could see from the chasm—where, with ears intent on every sound, and eyes intent on every object, I sat with cocked rifle, crouched behind my barricade — the flat and fertile karoo I had traversed, and might never traverse more.

Another hour and another were passed in

the keenest anxiety. Still the savages were about me, and still I could hear their guttural voices mingling with the Dutch gibberish and pigeon-English of the Hottentots, amid a great crashing of branches and the falling of dead trees, the skeleton roots of which were easily uptorn from the loose, light soil, and more easily still from the bare rocks round which, in the time of their life and greenery, they had twined.

What were these Amapondas about? Forming a species of scaling-ladders, perhaps; but such were useless, as they could ascend without them.

At last the sun set; the shadows began to deepen fast, and now, creeping to the verge of the chasm, I peeped over the dead body of Africander, and with horror discovered the trap, or fate, they were preparing for me.

All round the base of the insulated mass of rock, but chiefly to its windward side, these active and artful savages had piled vast numbers of dead trees, together with heaps of dry karoo-grass, fir-cones, and leaves; and, without doubt, were intending to fire the whole when duly prepared, for the purpose of suffo-

cating me, or smoking me out—perhaps of roasting me alive.

For some minutes I was utterly bewildered on discovering this unexpected measure, for which they had with due precaution removed all their horses to a place at some distance on the plain.

My past life had rendered me full of expedients, and apt to prompt and bold decision, so now my resolution was taken at once. The darkness had set in, and I knew that for hours there would be no moon visible.

Untwisting a cartridge, I mixed the powder of it with some of the blood which had flowed from the wound of Africander, with which I smeared my face and ears, shuddering with disgust as I did so.

By concealing my colour, I resolved, if seen, to pass in the dark for a Caffre, and to complete the disguise borrowed Africander's kaross, a short cloak of zebra-skin. On my back I slung my rifle, and prepared thus to steal downward among those who were intent on my destruction, with my hatchet in one hand and a poisoned assegai in the other.

To divert the attention of all, or of any

who might be watching my retreat from the base of the rock, I lifted up the dead body of the Hottentot, and uttering a shout, flung it headlong down among them. This was a most unexpected event, as they had forgotten all about him, or the fact that his body had been up beside me; and all rushed with tremendous cries to the spot where it fell.

The time was one of dreadful excitement to me. I stole out, crept softly downward on my hands and knees, crawling amid the very trees which were piled up to destroy me, under or over the stems, and between the branches, often close to the toiling savages, till I was among the long grass of the plain, and I heard the voices of my besiegers die away behind me, as I stole away to where their horses, four and twenty in number, were standing, all linked together.

As I drew near the horses, an armed Hottentot, whom I had failed to perceive before, started forward, with a bearing of suspicion and hostility. Something in my air, or the outline of my figure, dissatisfied him; and he was just opening his huge mouth to utter a shout of alarm, when I thrust the assegai into

it, and he fell wallowing in blood, while I, excited to the utmost degree, drew a long and painful breath.

I cut the rope that linked the horses together, and mounting the nearest one, rode off at full speed, followed by the whole like a herd of wild cattle, for fear was added to the fury with which they galloped when the dead trees were set on fire, and a roaring pyramid of flames rose around the solitary rock in the plain.

I heard the fierce crackle of that red and flaming sheet of fire, which cast my dark and absurdly elongated shadow far before me over the wild prairie. I heard a shrill yell of astonishment and dismay from the Caffres for the loss of their horses, and then every sound was lost to me, in the dull and monotonous rush of the hoofs, while, surrounded by the whole riderless troop, I rode fast and furiously towards the west.

CHAPTER XVII.

Maddened or encouraged in this wild race by each other's presence, the horses flew on, many of them neighing and snorting as if in sport or triumph. Often they pressed so close upon the flanks of the one I rode that I was fearfully crushed, and its speed was impeded; but anon the wild herd would open out, yet all press on together in this bewildering and aimless race.

In less than ten minutes the flaming rock and yelling horde were three miles behind us. My horse was not pursuing exactly the route I wished him to do. I pulled strongly on the bridle, but pulled in vain, for the animal seemed to have a head of iron. Instead of obeying the reins, he only gave a snort of defiance, for he had got the bit between his teeth, and laying back his ears wickedly, flew on like the demon horse of some fantastic story or German ballad.

I endeavoured to turn him by wrenching each rein alternately. In this process the bit-ring gave way, the bit itself slipped from the animal's mouth, the head-stall parted with the strain, and my horse, all unbridled, was utterly beyond my control.

I still retained the useless bridle in my hands, and held on by my knees and stirrups, for I dared not throw myself off, while the now free horse flew madly onwards. I conceived the idea of stunning the animal by a blow with the handle of my hatchet between the ears; but this only served to excite his fury and accelerate his speed.

With a sudden bound he dashed on, distancing his snorting companions, through rivers, over a vast plain, until he halted, in a wild and silent place, a few miles distant from a range of mountains, over which the pale moon began to rise.

As he paused in his mad career, I sprang from the saddle and knee-haltered him.

One circumstance I had to thank him for, at all events. He had borne me to a most satisfactory distance—some twenty miles, at least—from the now dismounted Amaponda

Caffres; but how little could I anticipate that he was bearing me once more to Mariqua!

I was breathless, faint, and weary.

In a runnel I gladly quenched my thirst, and freed myself of the horrid paste with which I had so successfully disguised my colour ere leaving that perilous rock in the plain, and now repose was necessary till day-break when I could look around me. As usual, when encamping in the bush, I cut down with my hatchet a quantity of brush-wood, and placed this in a circle round the spot where my horse and I were to pass the night together, for wild animals are always in fear of traps and snares, and though they might with ease have leaped over my frail barrier, they would not, I knew, venture through it.

I cut a quantity of grass for my horse, and after a final examination of my loaded rifle, and thanking heaven that I was again free, lay down to sleep, and slept soundly, too.

When I awoke, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was warm and balmy. Starting up, I looked around me. I was in a

wild place, covered with foliage and luxuriant greenery, but I could see that the place was the abode of snakes, scorpions, and puff-adders innumerable, so that it was a miracle I had passed the night unbitten.

By a single bullet I brought down a fine guinea-fowl when on the wing, and had it plucked and prepared for my breakfast, cooking it ere it was cold. I was too much famished to be very fastidious. A fire I made readily enough by untwisting a cartridge and sprinkling the powder among some dead leaves and dry branches. Therein I broiled my fowl in such a fashion as might have made Soyer faint; but, nevertheless, I relished it greatly, and on this bird and a bunch of wild honey-pot grapes made a regular bushranger's breakfast.

My next task was to repair my bridle as well as I could, and remounting, to set out on my journey once more. On clearing the bush among which I had passed the night, I found my runaway nag had halted just in time, for I was but a quarter of a mile or so distant from the edge of a long and lofty range of cliffs, up the back or gradually sloping ascent of which he had galloped.

From these cliffs I had an extensive view of a vast green plain, bounded by a chain of hills that seemed faint and blue in the distance, and over all that space my eye wandered, searching, but in vain, for a village, a kraal, a spire, a windmill, even the smoke of a solitary house, or anything that savoured of culture or civilisation; and my heart began to sink, for I had neither guide, map, nor pocket compass, and had now little more than a dozen cartridges remaining.

And lower still did my heart sink, when, on drawing close to the cliff's giddy verge, I discovered what was in the immediate foreground.

I shrank back instinctively, and then creeping forward on my face peeped over again.

There, in a green place overhung by the rocks, and about a hundred and fifty feet below me, were a party of armed Caffres—twenty or more, at least—squatted round a fire, at which they were preparing a repast, composed of birds and other animals recently shot by them, and the odour of their cooking came plainly upward to my olfactory nerves

on the soft morning air. Their horses were knee-haltered near.

If mine were to neigh but once, they would discover me; and it was a singular chance they had not heard the rifle shot by which I brought my breakfast down.

This group was startling enough in itself; but what were my emotions on recognising among them the figure of Vonga, and in another, whose smaller and more graceful form was partly hidden by a large striped European shawl, Mariqua.

Mariqua here in pursuit of me, doubtless, and with intentions that were not all loving probably; for I now perceived that my quondam wife was armed with a rifle, and it was a weapon which I knew she could use to some purpose.

To advance would be to attract the attention of those whose solicitude about my movements would soon prove very troublesome; to retire would bring me again among the Amapondas, who were now doubtless following up the trail of their runaway horses, and were perhaps within a few miles of me. So for some minutes after making this startling

and most unwelcome discovery I was completely bewildered.

I knew that, to reach the provinces of Calesberg or Richmond my route must lie south-west, and that ultimately I should certainly gain the shelter of civilised men at last; yet my way must lie through that very plain which my pursuers could overlook.

One fact was clear enough—the danger of lingering where I was. Already the Caffres had begun their breakfast, and some were acutually preparing to move. I could see the impatient Mariqua hand her rifle to a Fingo slave, and mounting a pure white horse—Mariqua doubtless now inflamed by pride, passion, and revenge, 'like a beautiful wild beast upon the trail.'

I imagined I could see—even at the distance we were apart—a cruel look in her dark eyes when she handled her rifle—a look like that of *Miami* in the 'Green Bushes' when she fires at her recreant lover.

Compunction was past now, and flight was still my sole object—flight and escape. A long belt of forest, that extended southward from the base of the cliffs, seemed to offer me

shelter and concealment. Descending with all the speed I could permit my nag to use on such steep and broken ground, I made a detour of a mile or two round the angle of the cliffs, rode through the wood, and after an hour or so of devious and troublesome progress, impeded by underwood below, baboon ropes and branches above, by fallen trees and the wondrous luxuriance of the foliage, I was once more on the open plain, and free, as I hoped, to pursue my lonely way unseen and uninterrupted, but hoped for this in vain; for barely had I emerged from the wood when a yell pierced my ear, and a musket shot whistled past me, barking a mimosa tree close by.

Turning furiously, I unslung my rifle. About fifty paces from me was a mounted Caffre, whom I recognised to be one of Vonga's men—an advanced scout, apparently —galloping rearward at full speed, no doubt to announce that he had seen me, and to state where my trail would be found.

His death would be my only safety. I levelled at him fairly between my horse's ears, and fired both barrels; but either it was the

rearing of the animal, or that my nerves were unstrung by all I had undergone, for, though a dead shot, I missed him. Reloading in hot haste, and using my knife as a goad, being without spurs, I urged my horse to his full speed over the plain, towards where the blue mountain ridges were rising, and for nearly twenty miles I rode on at a gallop, stopping only at an occasional time to breathe the animal, to look back, or to avoid some rent in the dry soil or jungle, where perhaps the puff-adder and scolpendra lurked.

On looking back about midday on the distant verge of the level plain I could see a line of black dots appearing, and once or twice a flash of light—the silver sheen of a gun-barrel. These were doubtless my pursuers, Vonga and his men, coming on.

And now before me stretched a vast river, rolling in sunny light from the south to the north, and barring all further flight — the Great Orange River, I supposed it to be, and such it proved eventually—and the sight of that broad expanse of silvery water filled me with despair.

I reined in my horse above the stream,

and a cold perspiration broke over me with the thoughts of recapture—torture—death.

I conceived the idea of urging my horse into the stream, which at its narrowest part seemed to be fully one hundred and eighty yards broad; but I knew not his power of swimming, or his tricks. I was little or no swimmer, and the brute might 'turn a turtle' with me, and leave me to drown. Seen now, and with these unwearying savages on my trail, concealment on the north bank was hopeless.

Besides, my way lay beyond this bridgeless stream, for there were those whom I now despaired of eluding unless I crossed it.

'To cross it; but how—how? Heaven help me! heaven aid me!' I exclaimed, with fervour, and leaped from my horse.

The invocation was not uttered in vain, for suddenly a happy thought inspired me.

Close by the river bank there grew several large trees covered with a thick rind, or bark, resembling that of the cork wood; and with my hatchet I proceeded to cut off a flake of this, about six feet long and three feet broad. Green and full of sap it was, and I had trouble

in getting it detached unbroken, and in such a state as to suit my purpose; but it was soon achieved, and as there were neither sight nor sound of my pursuers yet, I proceeded to work quietly and steadily to form it into an impromptu boat, by tying a tough vine trailer round it amidships to keep the bark curved in its natural form.

I then stopped up the ends by huge plugs, or masses of the thick red clay that lay by the riverside. Next cutting a branch to serve as a paddle, I stepped in and shoved off, in the hope that, if I failed to cross the stream, I might at least reach an islet that lay in the mid-channel.

My progress in such a craft was slow—slow as the crawling of a snail, though I paddled vigorously on each side alternately, and got it out into the mid-stream, when, with intense mortification and anxiety, I saw the clay dropping out and disappearing fast from stem and stern; but a more pressing fear came over me when I heard the yells of Vonga's men becoming louder and louder, and saw them, their horses covered with white foam, their eyes and teeth shining, their

crane's feathers and tiger-skin karosses, their brandished assegais and levelled rifles, their wild, ferocious, and most fantastic *tout ensemble* —and, horror! there, too, was Mariqua—as they came crashing down the steep bank at full speed, and leaping from their horses betook them to their weapons, sending shot after shot, and making the water start in silver spouts around me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Often have these Caffrarian episodes come back to me in my dreams, causing me to start and wake with horror and affright: for again I seem to see the brawny and naked forms, so lithe, so sinewy, and shining with oil, their fierce visages and crane's feathers, their gleaming eyes and sharpset teeth; and I seem also to hear their yells, with the crack of the rifle and the hiss of the launched assegai, in my dreamy ear. And Adrian Africander and the day in the chasm often come in those visions of the night, and the black ingratitude of this 'man and brother,' as the preachers would call him, was indeed bitter as the winter wind, though fearfully avenged at last.

Whether it was the fierce impatience of Vonga's men, or that they were bad marksmen, I know not; but, thank heaven, all their shots fell wide of the mark, and untouched by

them, I paddled my frail craft, which was filling fast, towards a rocky islet, and had barely reached that spot and swung myself by the branch of a drooping tree upon dry land, when the roll of bark which had so well served my purpose filled with water and sank slowly out of sight.

The islet was a mere rock, about a quarter of an acre in extent, but covered with verdure, for there the snowy jasmine, the blue plumbago, and the pink geranium were all growing together, and the place was literally alive with wild doves, which rose into the air like a white cloud, and flew hither and thither with affright when the muskets from the bank I had quitted opened fire upon me, sending streaks of red fire and spouts of white smoke out of the green jungle and mangroves, while the reports rang in the welkin, and the round bullets starred the rocky face of the isle.

Bathed in perspiration, for the heat of the day was intense and overpowering, I lay down on my face under cover of the rocky crest of the place, and selecting one or two Caffres whose woolly caputs were more prominently visible than others for a quiet pot shot, I sent

a pair of conical rifle balls at them, and had the satisfaction to see them toss up their black hands, and tumble over with a yell that indicated agony and fear.

The men of the chief, Vonga—who, like Mariqua, never sought concealment, but rode about gesticulating and exposed to my fire, of which they evidently had no fear—manifested no intention of swimming off to the isle. Perhaps they were deterred by the presence of two huge hippopotami, each weighty as five or six oxen, whom the sound of the firing had brought out of the tall herbage of the fens and the muddy ooze of the river. One of those enormous and most repulsive-looking brutes, with a brown and hairless body fully fourteen feet long, kept wading close by the islet, as if to bar any attempt I might make to escape on the southern side.

I dared not trust myself to attempt the passage by swimming; my skill in that art was small, and with an infuriated hippopotamus close to one's skirts, the idea was not to be put in practice. Besides, it would be most perilous for me to have my rifle and small stock of ammunition wetted by water.

How was I to pass the night, and how the succeeding day? If long detained on the isle there was every prospect of my being starved to death; so now I found myself in a predicament fully more awkward than when besieged by the Amapondas on the nameless rock in the plain. Had my frail bark but borne me fairly across, I might yet, though afoot, have reached some settlement or lager village.

If I had been aware that, though broad, the Orange River was there remarkably shallow, I would have made an attempt to ford it in the face of all their musketry; but I knew nothing of this till about sunset, when the purple shadows were falling on its crimsoned flow, and a wild cry of joy involuntarily escaped me on beholding—what?

A party of our own 12th Lancers, who, with all their red and white swallow-tailed banneroles fluttering gaily on the wind, white linen puggerees tied round their caps, and in their gay uniform—blue faced with scarlet—dashed at a rapid trot down to the river's edge, where they speedily extended in skirmishing order, and with their short carbines, which they carried unslung, with the butt resting

on the right thigh, they opened a rattling fire upon the men of Vonga, who immediately mounted and fled, carrying off with them Mariqua, whom I never saw more, and certainly had no desire to see.

'There is a white man on the rock in the river,' cried a voice in English, which came most sweetly, and as music, to my ear, showing that they had seen or discovered me.

'I have been a prisoner, and escaped,' cried I joyfully.

'With your life? Well, by Jove! that is a wonder!' replied the officer in command.

'What force are you?' I asked.

'Her Majesty's 12th Lancers.'

'So I see, sir; but are other troops at hand?'

'Yes. A great field force is coming on fast. We are the advanced guard of the army, under his excellency the Governor-General in person. Are the Caffres in force beyond you?'

'No. Are you marching against Sandilli?'

'He was used up long ago. We are moving against Mosheesh, the great Basuto chief, and cross the Orange River to-night.'

'But how?'

'By fording it.'

'Is it so shallow?' I asked with astonishment.

'Our engineers say so.'

On hearing this I at once rushed into the stream, which came nearly up to my armpits, and forgetting all about the two riverhorses, gained in safety the other side, where the wondering lancers gathered about me.

Seeing the miserable aspect I presented, the officer kindly gave me some cognac from his flask, and proffered his cigar-case, a luxury I was not slow in accepting.

'Are the 74th Highlanders with you?' I asked.

'Yes; and the 2d, or Queen's Own, too.'

'Clarice, Clarice,' thought I, with joy; 'then I shall have tidings of you from Douglas at last.'

And already her soft smile, her pale beauty, and her dark but lovelit eyes, seemed to come before me.

'Well, my friend, how long have you been in the hands of those confounded niggers?' asked the officer, a handsome young fellow,

eyeing me with much interest and commiseration, but through his glass, nevertheless.

'Since the storming of the Amatolas.'

'In the month of June?'

'Yes.'

'Good heavens! and this is now November—five months.'

'Nearly.'

'Stay; a thought strikes me. Are you Haddon, late of the —th Fusiliers, who was serving as a volunteer with the 74th Highlanders?'

'The same. I was wounded—stunned by a blow of a war-club—in the advance, and was left behind.'

'And how were you spared?' he asked with growing interest.

'I fell into unusually kind hands,' said I, loth that the name of Mariqua should appear in my narrative at that time.

'I must beg to congratulate you on your preservation. You were reported as dead—to have been cruelly tortured to death, in fact, by old Sandilli; and a very touching and flattering biography of you appeared in the *Cape Argus*,' continued the officer, laughing. 'But

my party forms the advanced guard, so we must cross the river here, and feel our way on the opposite bank. The head of the first brigade is already close at hand. Good-bye for the present. Close in, men! forward from the right by threes!'

And bowing to me, he led the way through the stream, which, much to my surprise, in the deepest part of the ford barely flowed to his holster flaps; and ere long I saw the banneroles and bright lance heads of his party above the mangroves on the opposite bank, as they rode in extended order slowly over the ground by which I had fled in such haste to the river.

My first reflection was of how the apparently authentic notice of my death would affect Clarice—my poor Clarice!—and I felt keen sorrow for the tears she must have shed, and the grief she must have endured.

Ascending a little eminence which commanded a view of the plain beyond the river, my heart beat lightly and happily when I saw our troops advancing on the line of march, with their rifles at the trail, but with drums beating and colours flying. They were formed

in two brigades, the first consisting of the 2d, or Queen's Regiment, and 74th Highlanders, under Colonel Macduff of the latter corps; the second was formed by the 43d, or Monmouthshire Light Infantry, and the 73d, or Perthshire; then the Rocket Battery, the Rifle Brigade, in their sombre green uniform, the gay 12th Lancers, the Cape Corps, and the Artillery, all toiling on under a blazing sun, which gave more than one man a fatal *coup de soleil*, for they had marched for more than twenty miles through a district that was literally a burning desert, and now their uniforms were powdered white by the whirlwinds of gravel and dust, amid which their arms and appointments would flash occasionally, though all else was veiled in obscurity.

On they came, marching sturdily and steadily towards the broad current of the magnificent Orange River, and now hastening towards the 74th Highlanders, I scanned their ranks for the tall and stalwart figure of my friend Douglas; but I looked along the line of captains in vain. Had he been killed, or had he died of the wound I had seen him receive?

Notwithstanding my wretched plight, I was soon recognised by many of the officers and men of the 74th, and loud exclamations of welcome, surprise, and warm congratulation greeted me as they marched past.

'What wonder is this? Haddon—Dick Haddon alive and hearty? How has all this come about, old fellow? cried the jovial Jack Bonteine, who, though an officer, had, for his own comfort, a travelling knapsack strapped to his back, a canvas havresack for provisions slung over one shoulder, his cloak, sword belt, canteen, and telescope slung over the other, and looked nearly as dirty and hairy, and quite as brown as myself, by long exposure.

In a few words I repeated to him all I had cared to tell the lancer, and added—

'But where is Douglas? I do not see him here. He's not dead, I hope?'

'Dead? Not at all. He never was better or more happy in his life than when we saw him last. But he has got a staff appointment, and has cut the Cape and the 74th together.'

'Gone?'

'To Jamaica.'

'When?'

'About two months ago.'

'To Jamaica?' I repeated, almost mechanically. 'And what of Major Carysfort?'

'Dead, poor fellow. I think he died soon after we carried the Amatola Heights. He expired at an obscure Dutch village, and was buried by the boors.'

'Fanny—his wife, I mean.'

'Ah, la belle Fanny is now Mrs. Gerard Douglas, and has accompanied the accomplished officer who bears that name to the West Indies, taking with her that pretty sister, whom, perhaps, you may remember.'

'Miss Haywood?'

'Exactly. Nice girl, rather.'

'Whew!' thought I. 'Here are strange tidings—my Clarice gone to Jamaica!'

The first brigade halted now, preparatory to crossing the river, and I felt like one in a dream when many officers of the 74th came round me in a group. Tall Archy Campbell, Forbes the doctor, little Ensign Calder, and others, all bronzed, bearded, in patched uniforms, tattered tartan and tarnished embroidery, anxious to learn how I had been spared the terrible fate to which the prisoners were

subjected, and their wonder seemed to increase on learning that I owed my life to the care of the merciless Sandilli.

'It is passing strange,' said Bonteine. 'Did you see any of his wives, of whom he has said to have as many as a farmyard chanticleer, and to use them as that anointed king of Cockayne, the Defender of the Faith, did his?'

'I saw none, I believe. He had me secluded at his home farm, in the Gulu Valley. Among his own people he does not seem to be a bad sort of fellow, and he fully lives in the bosoms and affections of his followers. Douglas and the ladies,' I added, 'would sail from Cape Town, I presume?'

'Exactly. On board of a fine clipper ship, the Eugenie.'

'And what has become of Percival Graves?'

'He of the white kids and parted hair?'

'I don't see him among the staff.'

'Oh, Graves got tired of the Cape when he found that the fair Haywood was going; so he got sick leave on a certificate from Forbes here that a sea voyage was necessary for the restoration of his health, and he, too, sailed in the Eugenie.'

'With them?'

'Yes.'

This information struck painfully a new or rather an old chord in my heart, and the thoughts flashed upon me rapidly: Clarice and Graves thrown together, so perilously as people always are on board of a ship, myself supposed to be dead, and she quite open to a favourable offer from her old admirer, too, the handsome and wealthy young Guardsman.

'Was the notice of my death circumstantial?' I asked, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

'Most circumstantial,' said the doctor.

'In what manner?'

'It was to the effect that the discovery of a forage cap of the 74th Highlanders, recognised by the quartermaster as one which he had given to Captain Haddon, rendered it certain that the remains found in the wood beyond the Amatolas, pegged to the ground and half devoured by birds and jackals, were those of that unfortunate gentleman.'

'Well, Bonteine,' I resumed, still seeking for information to feed and increase my jealous

doubts and fears, 'and how comes it that you and others allowed a handsome girl like Miss Haywood to leave the colony unwedded?'

'We are not marrying men in the 74th,' said Bonteine.

'And these not being the piping times of peace, we have quite enough to do,' said the doctor, 'and must leave love and matrimony to the idle.'

'Ungallant speech,' lisped Ensign Calder.

'Was not Graves supposed to be tender on Miss Haywood?' said I.

'Yes, awfully spooney; but there was another fellow whom she picked up somewhere about Graham's Town. He accompanied her to the coast, and also went with them all in the Eugenie; and he contrived to be always so much about Miss Haywood that poor Graves hadn't the ghost of a chance.'

'Another. Who was he?' I asked calmly.

'A kind of Dutch fellow,' continued Bonteine, in his rattling, offhand way; 'a wealthy merchant, rumour said.'

'But how was he named?'

'Mynheer van Neukerque.'

'*Whom* do you say?' I exclaimed in a tone

so startling that all surveyed me with surprise, and Bonteine slowly repeated the name, adding—

'He was a strange fellow, and Fanny Carysfort used to say, quoting from a book, that she thought "he was just one of those wicked people in whom one feels a sort of interest in spite of one's self."'

'Was his Christian name Schalk?'

'I don't know; but why so many questions, old fellow, eh?'

I felt utterly breathless and bewildered on hearing the revival of this strange and terrible patronymic.

'We have not much time for talking just now,' said Bonteine, leisurely lighting a cigar. 'The Queen's are about to pass the river, and our turn will come next.'

'But this Van Neukerque. What manner of man was he? What was he like?' I persisted.

'Was, say you?'

'Yes.'

'Is, you mean. I suppose the fellow is still alive.'

'Don't banter, please, Bonteine. I knew a

person of this name, and have special reasons for asking.'

'He was altogether an indescribable kind of man.'

'Say like a person in H.S.M.S.,' suggested Calder, the flippant ensign.

'I do not understand, sir,' said I stiffly.

'Calder means in his Satanic Majesty's service,' said Bonteine, laughing; 'and, sooth to say, he was pale, grim, and sombre enough to have acted the part of Mephistopheles in *Faust*.'

I asked no more questions. I had heard quite enough to perplex and bewilder me.

Carysfort dead, Douglas married to Fanny, Clarice gone to Jamaica, accompanied by the insinuating fop, Graves, and a mysterious personage picked up in the vicinity of Graham's Town—a Dutchman, named Neukerque. I could not help associating the latter with that terrible creature who figured in the narrative of Doctor Bruine Kasteel at Cradock, whom Speke van Bommel had pistolled, and whose body, prior to interment, I had seen Adrian Africander decapitate with a hatchet.

The flowing river, the columns of horse

and foot, the train of artillery and waggons, the far extent of plain, and the blue sky and distant hills, seemed to be all racing round me. I feared that I had been struck by a *coup de soleil*, or was becoming insane, so much was I disturbed by my own thoughts.

His Excellency the Governor-General and the staff, before whom I was brought for examination as to what I had seen and where I had been beyond the Orange River, found my replies so incoherent and so wide of the purpose, that I was abruptly dismissed from their presence, and not knowing what to do or where to go, I sat under a palm tree, gazing vacantly and dreamily at the army fording the shining river under a scorching sun.

The pencilled letters of Clarice and Douglas, with Mark Sharkeigh's confession—written, as related, in the wretched creature's blood—for a time the only links between civilisation, a past existence, and me—had reached the land dry in the pocket of my tattered blouse, and I now prepared to secure them in my Caffre head-dress, prior to recrossing the river, for as yet I had no place of abode, no settled home, but the camp of the 74th Highlanders.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SINGULAR sight the troops presented when crossing the stream. The 2d, or Queen's Regiment, was the first corps to move forward, and then followed the 74th Highlanders, with whom I crossed.

At the top of the path, or track, leading to the ford, the latter took off their boots, socks, and tartan trews, rolled their ammunition pouches in their blankets, which they tied around their heads or to the top of their knapsacks; the boots and socks were tied to the muzzles of their Minie rifles (the officers carried theirs on the points of their claymores), and in this quaint fashion, with arms sloped, the column marched right through the river.

The waggons and field pieces were slowly run into the water by drag-ropes, and were then pulled across by relays of soldiers and Hottentots.

Tents were soon pitched, and our clothing

dried fast in the sunshine. The place where the army passed the night was rendered pleasant and beautiful by the foliage of many olive groves and pale green willows, amid which the snow-white tents—particularly those of the 12th Royal Lancers—made a picturesque scene. These groves were teeming with brilliant flamingoes and sugar-birds, and the shrill pipe of the cicada was heard from every branch. The banks of the river there were green and shady, too, and along its margin in many places the agates, cornelians, and green serpentines lay so thick among the shining pebbles, that we might have filled our havresacks with them, had not ration beef and biscuits been more valuable commodities to us there.

This, as it proved, was fated to be my last night in camp.

The officers messed by companies, each captain and his two subalterns having one common box of provisions and stock of wine. Bonteine, Campbell, and Calder invited me to chum with them in their tent ; and then, for the first time after nearly five months, I enjoyed a meal that smacked of cooking and civilisation.

The doctor and one or two others joined us, and while we had broiled beef, fried baryas, or mullet, fresh from the adjacent river, we drank Cape smoke or brandy and water from tin pots, canteens, teacups, and so forth, for there was but little crystal in the camp.

Amid much of that heedless joviality and frivolous banter which form the staple feature in camp and barrack life, I heard, after telling my own story, a narrative of all that had passed during my captivity.

The Caffre corps had been everywhere destroyed by the troops, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fordyce, of the 74th, had fallen at the storming of the Water Kloof.

'Poor Fordyce,' said the doctor; 'he lived for a quarter of an hour after receiving his wound, and his last words were, "Take care of my poor regiment. Now I am ready!" and expired. He was a brave soldier, and a true Christian gentleman.'

Then I heard the terrible story of the loss of the Birkenhead transport, and how, when she had gone to pieces on a sunken rock, three hundred and fifty-eight officers and soldiers of the 2d, the 74th Highlanders, and other corps,

stood in their ranks on deck, and went down into the deep without a cry or a murmur, content that the women and the little ones were saved by the boats.

When the ship's fate became sealed, by drum and bagpipe Major Seton of the 74th 'summoned all to the upper deck;' and promptly was that call obeyed, though every gallant heart there knew it was his death summons. There they stood, as if in battle array, a motionless mass of brave men—men who were *men* indeed. The ship every moment was going down and down; but there were no traitors, no cravens there. The women and children were got into the boats; there were no boats for the troops; but there was no panic, no blanched, pale, quivering lips among them. No saint ever died more simply, no martyr ever died more voluntarily, no hero ever died more firmly, no victim ever met fate in a more generous spirit of self-immolation, than the soldiers of the Birkenhead transport.

With his Highland pistols tied to his neck, the gallant Seton and a few others struck out for the shore, only to become entangled among

the slimy weeds and trailers that rose up a hundred feet in length from the bottom of that tropical sea, and to perish there miserably, a prey to the innumerable sharks.

'The story of their bravery and generosity,' said Bonteine, 'would fire even the heart of a Quaker; and that is saying a great deal.'

'In anything wherein money is not concerned,' added the doctor drily.

Then they detailed to me the storming of Macomo's stronghold, the six attacks on the Water Kloof, and all the operations of the army, down to the present march it was performing to attack the great Basuto chief, whose defeat would—as it ultimately did—put an end to the Caffre war.

'This long story of yours,' said young Calder, 'is like one of old Somerset's despatches, as dreary as the overture to Wagner's "Tannhäuser"—about the most excruciating piece of music that ever was concocted by a meandering musician.'

'You are ennuyed, my little man,' retorted Bonteine.

'Not at all. I am jolly as a sandboy—as Sandilli himself,' replied the ensign, caressing

what he supposed to be a buff-coloured moustache.

'Fanny—Mrs. Douglas, I mean—never saw Carysfort, I suppose, after his being wounded at the Dutch village?' said I, longing to hear more of those in whom I felt a deeper interest than for the details of a barbarous war.

'Never,' replied Bonteine; 'and perhaps it was just as well.'

'Why?'

'I don't think she could ever have cared much for Carysfort.'

'How do you think so?' I asked abruptly.

'I happened to be close by when Douglas dried the pretty widow's tears,' said Bonteine, lowering his voice. '"And after all that has passed, you love me still, Gerard?" she said demurely, casting down her long eyelashes. "Passionately," responded our captain of Highlanders. "I feel very grateful and happy, dearest," said she, "with the conviction of being loved by one so good, so gentle, and so kind as you." I was Douglas's groomsman soon afterwards, and— What the deuce is that boy sniggering at?'

'At your love story, Bonteine—that is all,'

replied the unabashed Ensign Calder; 'so don't quote the Mutiny Act about laughing at one's superior officer. I knew that the fair Fanny was a bride the moment I saw her.'

'How? What should you know about it? You were on detachment at Fort Armstrong.'

'Her marriage ring looked so new, and fitted the tiny third finger so tightly.'

'It is a fine thing to talk rakishly, and it costs nothing but respectability,' said the doctor gravely. 'But pass that bottle, young fellow, and look sharp, please.'

'And how about your wife's wedding ring, my lad?' asked Campbell, who had taken no part in this camp 'chaff.'

'Wife! Don't think I shall ever have one, or go beyond an *affaire du cœur* with a handsome young flirt, married to a rich old party, having a good wine cellar, and no tattling incumbrances in the shape of children, to tell who kissed mamma's hand in the shrubbery. All such observant brats should be strangled.'

'Listen to young morality fresh from Sandhurst,' exclaimed the doctor.

'But a kiss of the hand is not a very deadly affair,' said Bonteine, laughing.

'Don't encourage the boy to talk in this loose fashion,' said the doctor angrily. 'I am older than you, Calder—'

'More than twice my age, I should think.'

'Yes—and age learns more than youth.'

'Youth learns to love,' lisped the ensign.

'Yes, and age learns to lose as well as to love,' retorted Forbes, and his words, and still more his tone, told of some secret story, too sacred for the present company.

'Was the health of Miss Haywood impaired by what she had undergone?' I inquired, with an air of casual indifference, while lying on the green sward which formed the floor of the tent, imbibing with intense satisfaction the fragrance of a fine havannah.

'No. She looked a little pale, and perhaps careworn; but such might be expected.'

'I'll swear that she blushed red enough when that fellow Graves kissed her,' said the incorrigible ensign.

'How?—where?' asked Bonteine.

'How?—as people usually do; and where?—on the cheek.'

'When, Mr. Calder?' I asked.

'On the day the Fingoes brought them in-

to camp; but we were all inclined to do the same thing, so overjoyed were we to see them alive and safe.'

'On the cheek?' I repeated, with a sternness that I could not conceal.

'Yes. It seems to have made an impression upon you,' continued the saucy Calder.

'How that brat's tongue runs on,' growled Dr. Forbes.

'And Graves went with them to Jamaica?' I resumed.

'Yes,' replied Bonteine, who went blundering on in a fashion quite as bad as Calder, talking barrack-room rubbish, perhaps, but such rubbish as proved very annoying to me —maddening, in fact. 'Graves went with them—with her, I should say.'

'Why?'

'Because, if they are not engaged they should be. We heard that you had been spoony on her; but so were others—some of the 12th Lancers, and one of the Rifles especially. Graves, however, was seldom away from her side after that hideous skeleton was found in the wood by Sergeant Burns of ours. He thought all was square then. I should

know how engaged people look—have been engaged myself about ten times, but never was hooked yet, and I don't mean to be till I get my spurs by brevet or the murrain among the majors. How mighty and mysterious are the secrets of your engaged stupidities—how nicely they open pedal communications with one another, and squeeze hands behind curtains or under the tablecloth! I know all about that style of thing, and have done it scores of times, though engaged only ten times, as I have said.'

I laughed incredulously, taking these speeches at their current value; but the Scotch doctor said, with one of his most saturnine grins:

'I can endorse his assertions of iniquity. He has got a diamond ring and a gold watch and appendages which to my certain knowledge at least ten girls have worn in succession.'

'Every one of whom was spoony on yours truly, Jack Bonteine, till the route or letters of readiness came.'

'Or till you got some one of ours who was on leave to telegraph, as your father or uncle,

that you were about to be cut off with a shilling. Then the watch and ring were returned; but they are as well known in most garrison towns as the goat of the Welsh Fusiliers.'

'It is profanity in you, Forbes, to mention such tender mysteries. Yes,' resumed the laughing Bonteine, 'Graves went with *la belle* Clarice, and notwithstanding the Dutch—What was the fellow's name?'

'Van Neukerque,' said I huskily.

'Yes; being present, he will improve the golden opportunities—and we all know that they are manifold—afforded by a long voyage at sea. Pass the Cape smoke, Haddon. You don't drink, old fellow.'

'Thanks,' said I, and swallowed a bumper to hide or to drown my chagrin.

'Fill again, Haddon,' said Bonteine; 'you look as if you lacked the Circean cup that cheers but not inebriates.'

'Nay, but it does,' said I, 'if you read the classics aright.'

'Bother the classics. Don't talk of them; it makes me think of my old cramming and grinding days at Sandhurst,' said Calder.

Poor rattlepated boy! He perished next

day of a sunstroke when on the march, and was buried under a pine tree in the wide and desert karoo over which I had so lately fled.

Undeterred by the troubles that had beset me, my first intention had been to accompany my old friends, the 74th, in the new campaign against Moshesh, the Basuto, to give one more clasp to the war medal which I knew to be my due, and to write by the first mail to Douglas and Clarice, at Jamaica; but the information I had received, in the bantering manner just related, made a complete alteration in my plans; and so, when next morning the tents were struck at daybreak, and the army resumed its march, I bade adieu to my whilom comrades, and taking advantage of the companionship and escort of some twenty men of the various corps, who, under an officer, were going back to the town of Burghersdorp, being found unfit for field service; and with something of a sorrowful heart, I heard the wail of the pipe and the tap of the drum die away by the banks of the Great Orange River, as we turned on our homeward march over the almost pathless karoo.

CHAPTER XX.

People rarely, if ever, fall in love with those they have known long.

I had been known to Clarice Haywood for years—since her girlhood almost. We had loved each other, and been separated by misfortune, but to meet again under sudden and extraordinary circumstances. Now, once more were we parted; to her apparently for ever, by my supposed death, for so sure were all of that event, that Douglas's company of the 74th had fired three volleys over the remains of Hans Bruine Kasteel as mine.

Percival Graves was with her, and he, though a fop, was insinuating in manner, handsome in figure, and every way an eligible person. She was alone in the world; her only sister was married again, and what more probable than that now she might fall in love with this new suitor, and commit to oblivion,

if she could, the memory of the old? I even imagined all that my old friend Douglas might have to urge upon the subject.

Then, what weight was I to attach to the mention of that obnoxious name of Neukerque in conjunction with hers? Was it reality, or the mere rantipole of Bonteine and the thoughtless boy Calder, that such a person hovered about Clarice, and had actually sailed with her to the West Indies? And who was he, the unprepossessing stranger who had so suddenly turned up, and in the neighbourhood of Graham's Town too?

This new feature in our fortunes filled me with perplexing thoughts, from which I sought to shrink; but they would not be cast aside, and rose hydra-headed in my mind.

Nevertheless, whatever might happen, I was bound to follow her, and I burned now with longing and impatience to reach the coast, to embark and set forth upon the sea; but when thinking of the distance to be traversed by land, and still more by water, my heart sank within me, for the time that it would consume might serve to destroy all.

From the Orange River to Algoa Bay was

a distance of two hundred and fifty miles; thence to Cape Town, where alone I could hope to find a vessel for the West Indies, was four hundred and fifty miles by coaster, and then four thousand two hundred more at least were to follow by sea, and there were neither railroad nor telegraphs as yet in that remote land.

Every mile of that long voyage would be traversed by Clarice long before me, and I recalled with jealous bitterness and irritation the hints that Bonteine had given of the 'manifold opportunities' afforded by a long voyage for tenderness and lover-like attention.

My homeward march with the little band of invalid soldiers was but the beginning of an end that I could not foresee. I strove to be patient, to be resigned, and to persevere. We had escaped with our lives from the hands of the Caffres, and there was yet hope.

Two days' march brought us to Burghersdorp, a little town with a thatched Dutch church, where we procured a store of cheroots and lucifer matches, and pots of cold cream, wherewith to anoint our sun-blistered cheeks and noses. A sand-storm compelled

us to make a long halt in Fort Armstrong, a strong square tower, surrounded by a score or so of wattle-and-daub houses, which had been heavily shelled, and stormed by General Somerset at an early period of the war, when garrisoned by the rebel Kat River Hottentots, who had been wont to sally forth to plunder the country.

Down through the provinces of Colesberg, Cradock, and Somerset we made our march—a long and most toilsome one it proved, for many of the poor invalid soldiers died, and were buried by the wayside—till we came in sight of the South Indian Sea and the Bay of Algoa.

As we marched into the town of Port Elizabeth, its dull-looking streets and dreary background of bare hills were not without a certain nameless charm to me, for I remembered that the eyes of Clarice Haywood must have rested on them, though she was in the society of others, who then, as now, would enjoy and feel all the influence of the fascination that pervaded her whole being, and all she said and did.

In the bay, H.M.'s sloop Active was lying

with her steam getting up. A signal was made from the harbour, and no time was lost in transferring us on board of her. No difficulty was made about a passage for me to Cape Town, as I had served as a volunteer with the 74th Highlanders, the remains of whose officer's dress I still wore.

Astride the naked shoulders of some athletic Fingoes we were placed in the boats of the ship, which soon conveyed us on board of her. My luggage consisted of Jan Cupido's double-barrelled rifle, which I hoped yet to hang in Haddonrig, as a souvenir of perilous times.

There were a few preliminaries to adjust, and the Active steamed out of Algoa Bay. On the morning of the third day I beheld that which I had not seen for five years, the great Table Mountain, over which a snow-white mist was floating.

Running in from Table Bay we came to anchor. I soon bade adieu to the Active, and was ashore in Cape Town, at my bankers' for funds, at the tailor's for an outfit, and at the harbour in search of a ship bound for Jamaica. My bankers had long since thought me num-

bered with the dead, and were about to advertise for my heirs or representatives in the London and Edinburgh newspapers.

I soon discovered the agent of the Eugenie, and I begged that he would favour me with a list of her passengers. It was duly shown me, and I read the names of 'Captain and Mrs. Gerard Douglas, Miss Haywood, Lieutenant Percival Graves, Mynheer S. van Neukerque, Mr. John Smith,' &c.

'I—can you tell me the Christian name of this person, Van Neukerque?' I inquired of clerk who showed me the ledger, and I felt while doing so that I was somewhat blank in visage, and sorely perplexed in heart.

'No, sir.'

'But why?'

'Simply, sir, because I don't think he gave it.'

'It was surely not Schalk?'

'I cannot say, sir, never having heard it,' replied the clerk.

'Had he any friends in Cape Town?'

'None; I believe he was a total stranger.'

'Did you see him?' I asked anxiously.

'Yes, sir; twice. First when he came

here, accompanied by Miss Haywood and Captain Douglas, to secure his berth, and secondly, when he came to pay for it, before the sailing of the Eugenie.'

The incidental conjunction of his name and that of Clarice made me wince.

'Pardon me troubling you with so many questions; but what manner of man was he—handsome, eh?'

'No, sir; far, perhaps, from handsome; but he was a very remarkable-looking man.'

'Describe him, please. I feel particularly interested in this Mynheer van Neukerque, having once had a—friend of the same name.'

'He was a pale and colourless man, with quick restless eyes, and very red lips. He possessed a very insinuating manner. He seldom smiled, however, and when he did so one was always struck by the whiteness and apparent sharpness of his teeth.'

'That will do, thank you.'

'Do you recognise your friend by this description?'

'Rather too plainly,' said I, and left the somewhat perplexed official.

I hurried into the sunshine, and wandered

about as one would do in a dream. I could not collect my thoughts, which were now of the most alarming nature. Could this man, this creature, whose story and whose nature were so monstrous as to be incredible, have come back from the valley of the shadows to cross my path again? Or was this fellow passenger of Clarice—this admirer, too, as I have been told—but one who bore the same name?

If this man resembled his appalling namesake, Clarice was safe from him as a lover; and Graves was the person, I knew, from whose presence and attentions there was most to fear.

After a delay that proved sickening to one of my impatient temperament, I at last secured a cabin passage on board the ship Wanderer, bound for Jamaica. We sailed from Table Bay on the last day of the month of December. I remember the moon, low, round, and large apparently as a wheel, rose slowly upward to light the sea with her crimson radiance. On that same moon, in another latitude, the dark eyes of Clarice might then be sadly gazing, while she thought of me as I

thought of her; and prayerfully and hopefully I whispered to myself:

'Shall I win her, and yet wear her in my heart?'

CHAPTER XXI.

We had not been a day at sea before I discovered a kind of old friend in Captain Walmer; for though we had never met before we had often heard of each other, as he proved to be a native of Colchester, where I had twice been quartered; and, moreover, he was the elder brother of Isabella Walmer, a girl concerning whom Douglas had quizzed me more than once, the friend, gossip, and correspondent of Clarice and Fanny Haywood, both of whom he had seen when visiting Walcot, and knew well. Thus, we had several topics to discuss in common, when pacing to and fro on the quarter-deck by day, or lingering over cigars and a glass of brandy and water at night before turning in.

John Walmer was a round-headed, curly-haired, goodhumoured-looking fellow, about thirty-five years of age, and stood five feet

eight in his shoes. He had clear blue eyes, a fine set of teeth, possessed rather handsome features, and voluminous brown whiskers. During twenty of his thirty-five years he had seen nearly every sea and shore in the four quarters of the globe, and had been ship-wrecked and cast away some four or five times, and had abundance of anecdotes and stories to tell, and as he was well educated, he told them remarkably well.

His conversation was lively, amusing, and by no means overloaded with nautical jargon, like that of conventional seamen, such as William in *Black-eyed Susan.*

Captain Walmer had three mates, the chief of whom, Mr. Bill Hawsewood, was somewhat of a character in his way. He was the captain's senior in years, and a rough-spun tar, rather of the old school, before 'wooden walls' went out of fashion and iron ones came in, and in addition to the other members of the crew we had Joe Mullins, the boatswain, and Derrick, the carpenter.

Mr. Bill Hawsewood, perceiving that I was very bronzed in visage, and that my hands, long strangers to gloves, were browned

by the hot African sun, was pleased to compliment me in his own fashion.

'I like you, Captain 'Addon; you're a purpose-like fellow, if one may so speak of a gentleman. You looks like one as has had his fingers dipped in the tar-bucket, and knows how to serve a rope without being ashamed of it.'

For many days and nights our voyage was pleasant and prosperous, and the weather fair and fine, with nothing to vary the intense monotony of those days and starry nights—the sameness of the scene, where the blue sky met the blue sea around us—save the petrel tripping along, the occasional appearance of a gliding shark, or a whale upheaving its vast brown bulk, to remind us of Sindbad's floating isle, painting the ship or bending new canvas on her, a passing sail, too often hull down—*i. e.*, below the horizon—or a piece of drift-wood floating past, suggesting unpleasant ideas of shipwreck.

But still the good ship Wanderer sped on, until one day, after a run of seventeen hundred miles or so, we were becalmed within some thirty leagues of the island of Ascen-

sion. The wind had completely failed us, and the Wanderer lay upon the waveless sea like a log in a dead calm. Not a sail was in sight, and all around the eye could scarcely tell where sky and ocean met. Both were of the same pale and almost colourless hue, the result of fierce heat and white haze, for the sun was blazing hot overhead, and the pitch was oozing out of the planks even beneath the awning of canvas which Walmer for our comfort aft had rigged over the quarter-deck.

In vain we whistled for the lagging wind, and cast little bits of charred wood overboard to discover which way the stream went, for it simply rose upward and melted away. Aloft the dogvane hung pendant and motionless, while blocks and cordage and brailed-up canvas flapped heavily, and at times with a sound like thunder, on the stilly air, as the great ship rolled to and fro on the long, slow, and huge upheavals of the glassy sea.

On each of these occasions the loose rigging would form bends and the canvas be puffed out as if a coming breeze had caught them, and flap, as I have said, with a terrible thud on the spars again.

Dreamily, and lost in thought, I was leaning over the starboard quarter, gazing listlessly at each successive heave that rolled glittering past the counter, and wondering by what mysterious agency the water rose and fell thus without wind, and where the distant storm had been of which this submarine commotion was the result, when suddenly I heard the voice of Walmer shouting:

'Lower the port quarter-boat, Mr. Hawsewood. Clear the fall-tackle and out with fenders—handsomely, now—and shove off, for these rollers are heavy enough to swamp her under the counter.'

'Ay, ay, sir; all right. I'll soon overhaul it for you,' replied Hawsewood.

'To pass it would never do. Their turn to-day may be ours to-morrow.'

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'Not much; only a message from the sea.'

'In what form?'

'A pleasant enough form when one sees it on the table, full of fine old crusted port, or pale, dry dinner sherry.'

'I don't understand,' said I, a little pettishly.

'Do you see what is floating yonder?'

'Where?'

'To starboard.'

'Yes.'

And there, about forty yards from the ship, a common black quart bottle was visible, floating steadily on the glassy sea, and not bobbing up and down as a corked bottle usually does when the waves are in motion.

Very little will rouse curiosity and cause excitement on board of a ship during the monotony of a long tropical voyage.

The sailmaker, who was busy with needle and thread on a new set of studding sails; black Jumbo, who was half melted in his galley while preparing the day's junk and pea-soup; the watch below, who lay dozing in their bunks; the cabin boy, who was laying the table, and all hands came tumbling up to line the vessel's side, while Bill Hawsewood, with one seaman, pulled off in one of the quarter-boats, and soon brought the bottle on board.

It proved to be a common quart bottle, evidently of English make, and it was formally taken down to the cabin by Captain Walmer.

It was found to be firmly corked, and to have a little piece of paper, evidently damp, lying at the bottom of it.

'Bad news of some poor craft upon the sea, or perhaps under it by this time,' said Walmer, as the cabin boy brought a corkscrew, and Hawsewood, Joe Rudyard, the second mate, Mullins, the boatswain, and I drew near, and we could see the brown faces of several of the crew, full of expectation and curiosity, bent over the open skylight.

The piece of damp paper was extracted, carefully smoothed out, and was read thus :—

'Ship Eugenie, from Cape Town to Jamaica, foundered in south latitude 7 deg. 55 min. 56 sec., west longitude 14 deg. 23 min. 50 sec. Every boat destroyed, and all the crew and passengers lost, save one woman and ten men who are now on a raft, and hourly expecting it to go to pieces. God help us!'

'The Eugenie from Cape Town!' I exclaimed, in a voice so full of grief and terror as to be quite unlike my own.

'Heavens—good heavens!' cried honest Jack Walmer, as he rushed to the locker, and gave me a glass of brandy. 'Why, 'tis the

very craft in which Miss Haywood and her friends sailed.'

'She must have gone down somewhere hereabouts,' added Hawsewood, quite calmly.

Again and again, with dim eyes, and a heart wrung by the most terrible emotions, I read that little scrap of damp paper, so hastily pencilled under circumstances so appalling, till every word of it seemed to be burned into my brain in letters of fire.

The handwriting seemed somehow to be familiar to me; but whose it was I could not determine. However, it was not that of Clarice.

'Come, come, my good friend,' said Walmer, clapping me kindly on the back, 'take heart of grace. They may have been picked up by some passing craft.'

'They—who?' I asked vacantly.

'Those survivors on the raft.'

'It was hourly expected to go to pieces.'

'But it may not have gone to pieces after all.'

'The latitude and west longitude given on that ere slip o' paper are nearly the bearings of the island of Ascension,' said Hawsewood,

who, after running his eye over a chart, was recording the message word for word, carefully and methodically, in his log-book.

'You are quite right, Bill,' said Walmer approvingly, 'and at Ascension we may hear something about them.'

'Do you think so, Walmer?' I asked, looking at him helplessly and hopelessly, while my tongue became parched, and I felt that my face was white and pallid.

'There is always a chance.'

The woman on the raft—who was she? Was she my own Clarice or her sister Fanny, a servant or another lady passenger? And was Douglas one of the ten unfortunate men?

These surmises flashed like lightning on my mind.

After glancing at the chart—

'She must have gone down just near where we are now,' said Mullins, 'some eighty miles or so off Ascension; and a tough gale she must have encountered, sir, for she was one of the best craft as ever was slipped off the dog-shores at Blackwall, was that ere Eugenie.'

'Eighty miles—and on a raft,' said Hawse-

wood thoughtfully. 'The Lord only knows what those poor folks may have endured.'

'And how they may have fared,' added Mullins; 'eating one another without salt, mayhap.'

'I've known o' such things,' said Bill Hawsewood.

'Stop, Bill,' said Walmer peremptorily.

But Bill was too full of his morbid subject, and would not be stopped.

'I *have* known o' such things being done in my time,' said he, pushing his straw hat back to enable him to scratch his brown, curly poll with greater facility. 'When I was a bit of a cabin boy on board the Jackal, of Yarmouth, and when within three days of Porto Piu, in the island of Fayal, we fell in with a water-logged ship in a heavy gale of wind, when there was such a sea running as no boat could live in, so we never thought of lowering one. We laid the main course a trifle to the mast, though it was close reefed, and passed her slowly. She was evidently timber laden, half dismasted, and could never sink. A living woman, half dead to all appearance, was lashed aloft in the mizentop, to keep her

out of the waves that were surging like mad over the deck, which was flush with the sea; and in the main shrouds there was the body of a dead man, lashed by the wrists, and on him, s'help me bob, the survivors had been supporting what the doctor called "exhausted nature." We could assist them in no way, even at the risk of the ship and of our lives, so we were obliged to fill the yard again, and bear away into the mist and the coming night; but the wailing cry of despair as them poor souls gave over the sea when they saw us leave them went straight to the heart of every man on board the Jackal.'

Fearing the rehearsal of some more such anecdotes, I went on deck; and Walmer, who was a kind and goodnatured fellow, clambered aloft with his most powerful glass. He scanned the smooth and oily expanse of ocean in every direction, but no trace of plank or raft, or of any floating thing, could anywhere be seen.

I pictured to myself alternately Clarice and Fanny—in the selfishness of love I must admit that it was chiefly of the former I thought—enduring all the horrors of a protracted

death upon an open raft, half submerged in the sea, the unsheltered glare of the fierce tropical sun by day, the gloom and chill and greater terrors of the night—hunger, thirst, despair, and madness—all that I had ever read of in romance and reality came floating fast upon my memory now.

They might have had some food—some water, too. If so, how long would they last?

Would they be kind to her, or would brutal, sordid selfishness prevail? Doubtless they would do all that Christians might do to alleviate her terrible sufferings. She was a woman, and ever gentle and soft in her nature. Oh, too tender for a fate so terrible.

And that ubiquitous and mysterious Mynheer S. van Neukerque—was he, too, on the raft, one of the ten? He who, for all I knew, might be similar in nature to that terrible being, in whose strange nature poor Bruine Kasteel had almost taught me to believe, and who, I knew, had abstracted the dead body of Gertrude van Bommel.

The whole episode of the bottle was like a hideous dream, which I could not have realised but for the presence and tangible exist-

ence of the piece of pencilled paper—that terrible and solemn message of the dying from the sea.

Every day we read of such messages in the newspapers. They are picked up in bay and creek, on the high seas, as this one was, or by the loiterers among the shingles and the shell-gatherers by the shore; but to how few hearts do they come so terribly home as this one came to me.

As I looked upon the ocean with grief and loathing it seemed to be but as a grave—a vast grave now to me—the grave of all my hopes and desires.

'"Oh, treacherous sea!"' thought I, quoting the words of another, '"you can smile and smile, and break into ten thousand smiles, and make such dainty music on the pebbly shore, who can believe how cruel your wrath can be that has not seen you tear man's floating house to fragments, and whelm him with his dear ones in your gaping depths?"'

And thus by the treacherous sea had the floating home of Clarice been torn, and my poor heart too.

Yet, as the drowning will cling to straws,

I remembered the words of Walmer, and hoping against hope, believed that at Ascension, where he meant to touch, we might hear some tidings of the lost ship, or of the raft, with the survivors of her passengers and crew.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEXT morning I was roused from my sleepless couch by the cheerful voice of Walmer hailing me down the companion way.

'Come on deck, Captain Haddon. Ascension is now in sight, and bears about twelve miles north on the lee bow!'

'A little time and I may know all—the best or the worst. Death itself is better than the bitterness and horror of such suspense as this,' thought I, as I sprang from the pillow on which I had not closed an eye during the long, long, weary night that had at last passed away.

The sky was calm, the sea smooth, the morning beautiful, and we were running before a fine breeze under a heavy press of canvas.

Not a sail was in sight; but the long, smoky pennant of some great ocean steamer,

as yet unseen, though the sound of her engines could be heard for miles across the sea, rose at the horizon far, far away.

And there upon our lee bow towered Ascension, the island of present hopes and fears.

After a long voyage, any land is a source of deep interest, whether it be one's native shore, or one on which our eyes have never rested; but this solitary island in the South Atlantic inspired a deep and terrible concern in me.

'Patience—patience!' I kept repeating. 'A little time, and I may know all.'

'Few lives, even the most prosaic, are without some romance,' said Walmer, who overheard me; 'and this is a bit of yours.'

'True,' replied I; 'but sorrowful—too sorrowful to be endured with patience. What a strange coincidence that our ship should pick up the message that mentioned the loss of hers.'

'Yes; but stranger things than that happen in the course of a seafaring life.'

Fast rose the volcanic isle from the sea as the Wanderer flew on under a cloud of sail.

With many a basaltic peak, all portions, however, of one black and bleak conical mountain —the same on whose summit the pious and adventurous Portuguese, Juan de Novo, erected a stone cross when he discovered the island on Ascension Day in 1501—the sterile place is so bare that only the vegetable productions, one of which is grass, exist in all its sixty miles of rock and sand. It is now the rendezvous of our African squadron; but in times long past the early voyagers were wont to deposit their letters in a crevice of the rocks, still known as the sailor's post-office.

There, in a well-corked bottle, the crews left their tender messages to sweethearts and friends, and they were taken to their destination by the crew of the next ship that passed in a contrary direction, and of many a brave heart and of many a stout ship that never have been heard of more was the last news found in that primitive letter-box in the then lonely Isle of Ascension.

In that bleak place a little British settlement has sprung up, and our flag was flying on the pigmy fort that was built when the great Emperor was pining a captive on that

other lonely islet of the Southern Sea—the rock of St. Helena.

We ran along the coast of the island, which is about ten miles long. The wind changed a little as we got under its lee; but Walmer worked his ship into the Bay of Ascension, and then, shortening sail, hove to, and ordered a boat to be lowered instantly.

I was the second man who sprang into her, and with six hands Walmer and I were pulled ashore. Of the harbour master—if the old man in charge of the little port and pier may be so named—we made every inquiry as to whether any one on the island had heard aught of the wreck of the Eugenie, or of her raft.

But he and all who gathered round us shook their heads. Some months before a ship so named had touched at Ascension on her way to the Leeward Isles or Jamaica, none knew exactly which; but all had prospered well with her and her crew to that time.

If she had foundered it must have been soon after leaving Ascension, 'as heavy gales of wind had occurred about that time, and in

one of them Her Majesty's ship Hairyadney'—for so he named it—'had all her masts swept by the board like baccy pipes.'

With this meagre and rather alarming information I was forced to be contented, and Walmer, after getting five fine turtles, a goat, and some spirits for our use in the cabin, shoved off for the ship. We soon after bore up, making all possible sail, and in six hours Ascension was as many leagues astern.

On arriving in Jamaica now rested the last vestige of hope in my aching heart. I could but visit the merchants or brokers to whom she was consigned, and hear from them a final corroboration of that terrible message from the sea.

'If the underwriters have paid up,' said Walmer, 'we may be certain that it is all dickey with the poor Eugenie, and Davy Jones alone could tell her story.'

Oh, how dear seems that which we have lost, or are about to lose for ever! Can it be that true love only becomes lasting after separation or death? The wind was favourable, and for weeks our voyage was most prosperous. In due time, in our north-western

course, we sighted Cape San Roque, a headland of Brazil, and ran along the coast of South America, when a terrible catastrophe overtook us on the sea.

The night was beautiful. The ship was lying her course under easy sail, and I was walking on the weather side of the quarter-deck alone, and occupied only with my own thoughts and the fag end of a cheroot before going below to seek my restless couch. There was something sadly soothing in the calm aspect of the midnight sea, and in the rippling sound of its waters as the ship glided through them, in the solemn hum of the wind through the rigging aloft, and in the appearance of and whiteness of her vast cloud of canvas, for though there was no moon the sail seemed white as snow against the deep blue of the starlit sky.

Yet the skies of those southern climes are less studded with stars than those of our own northern hemisphere. For south of the equator are great spaces without a single twinkler, and these dark and unlighted portions of blue vacuity give a wonderful brightness to such constellations as the Southern

Cross—one so wonderful in its beauty, and so impressive in its aspect, that more than once I saw a devout Spanish seaman on board the Wanderer, a Catholic, on his knees in a dark corner of the ship, lest his English messmates should mock him at his prayers, with his black and shining eyes fixed earnestly upon it, as the emblem of his faith glittering in its glory amid the blue dome of heaven.

Suddenly I was roused from my own thoughts by that cry which everywhere fills the heart with alarm; but nowhere is it so fatal in its significance as at sea.

'Fire!—fire in the forehold! Fire! fire!'

The whole crew were instantly on deck, and certainly smoke was seen to be issuing from under the iron bands, the wooden covering, and the canvas tarpaulin of the fore hatchway.

'Off with the hatch—men, work with a will! Be cool and steady, rig the hose, and stand by with the fire buckets!' cried Walmer.

The latter were instantly brought from their place at the break of the poop, the hatch was taken off, and then that most terrible sight at sea, flames were seen shooting up the fore

hatchway. Some cases of petroleum had broken loose, and the whole forepart of the ship was speedily a mass of irrepressible fire.

The sharp hiss of a few buckets of water, which were almost evaporated in their descent amid the scorching heat, showed how unavailing would be our efforts to save the ship, the whole cargo being of the most inflammable description.

The roaring of the flames, as they ran in circles round the well-greased mast, along the tarry forestay, and set fire to the foresail, forestaysail, and jib, was appalling, and the noise and confusion consequent on so sudden and terrible a catastrophe were so great, that Captain Walmer had to provide himself with his speaking trumpet to make the now bewildered crew obey him.

By the rapidity with which the conflagration spread, the crew were separated into two portions—the greater part were amidships; but seven or eight were compelled to take refuge far ahead, upon the bowsprit, and even the flying jibboom.

'Let her drive before the wind, square the

mainyard,' cried Walmer, 'and so let her go till we have the boats clear and ready for lowering. Bring up the charts, the log-book, and my chronometer. Mr. Hawsewood, put a beaker of water and a bag of biscuits into each boat, and stand by with a gang to lower away. Keep quiet, men, for the sake of your lives. We must save them, if we cannot save the ship.'

That which added to the terror of the seamen was the knowledge that we had gunpowder on board, and we knew not the moment the flames might reach it and send us to eternity. Thus the clamour grew great, and confusion greater, several men all shouting at once.

'Remember the powder — remember the powder!'

'It is aft the mainmast!' cried one.

'Scuttle the water tank,' suggested another.

'Stand by, men, to lower the boats,' commanded Hawsewood, who with great promptitude had fulfilled the captain's orders, and put into three of the boats compasses, bread, and water—a duty in which I assisted him.

'Where is Mr. Rudyard, the second mate?' asked Walmer, suddenly recollecting him.

'Ill in the forecastle bunks,' replied a voice.

'Is he not one of those astride the bowsprit?'

'No, sir,' replied Mullins, the boatswain.

'Can we get him out?'

'Impossible, sir; fire is all about—the flames have cut him completely off.'

'Then heaven help the poor fellow!' exclaimed Walmer.

At that moment we heard a shriek, and the second mate, in his night-dress, was seen to make a dart from the forecastle hatch, and passing almost through the flames, to leap headlong into the sea over the bows, and we never saw him again.

The fall of the foremast with a dreadful crash, when the shrouds and the forestay were scorched through, and the consequent descent of the maintopmast, with all its gear and hamper, yards and sails, reduced the vessel in a moment to a complete wreck, and the clouds of loose canvas that enveloped the deck—actually imprisoning some of the crew, as they

caught fire fast and furiously—compelled us to lose no time in quitting the fatal ship.

She had four boats, but, unhappily, two of these were swamped and filled with water alongside by the unequal and hurried manner in which the fall-tackles were let go, and a third was dashed to pieces by the descent of the maintopsail yard, which disabled or killed outright—we never knew which—four of our men.

Mullins, the boatswain, the black cook—who was shouting all the while, 'Jumbo, oh, Jumbo!'—the Obeah man of the Negroes—with Walmer and myself, contrived to get the fourth, and now only serviceable, boat successfully lowered. She had all her oars secured to the thwarts by a lashing, which we cut.

We then shoved off on the port side to get clear of the ship, and pick up such of the crew as might jump overboard.

The fire had not yet reached the cabin, or store-room; but by the fall of the rigging, and especially of the set sails, all of which were soon in flames, we had no chance of getting provisions for this boat, which was the

only one poor Hawsewood had not time to store.

We pulled round under the bows, and picked four men off the bowsprit easily enough, as they slid down by the dangling ends of some half-burned ropes.

The scene was now grand and awful. The entire ship was one mass of roaring flame. It shot out at the windows astern, at the ballast ports ahead, and lit up the little circular ports of the cabin berths; and now the danger of the exploding powder compelled us to pull some distance, so that we could not, but at the risk of our lives, return to take off four of the crew—one of these was Hawsewood—whom we saw hanging on by the lower irons of the mizen chain plates, and to whom we hallooed in vain to drop into the sea and strike out towards us.

Perhaps the poor fellows were not swimmers, or were too paralysed by fear to understand us, and they would have continued to hold on there, half submerged in the sea, till the chain plates grew too hot for their grasp, or till the showers of falling sparks choked them; but suddenly there was a terrific and

roaring crash, as the powder in the hold exploded.

A vast and conical pyramid of red fire and glittering sparks ascended high into the air, to arch over and then to fall, as if from the zenith, in a hissing shower upon the sea, and then for a time all became comparative darkness; but for a time only, as the flames gathered new strength, fore, aft, and amidships, and then some fifty tons of saltpetre which she had on board continued to burn steadily, casting a blue and ghastly glare for thirty miles or more upon the sea, and pale and most sepulchral looked our blanched and saddened faces in that cold and chilly light, which made everything so luridly horrible, tipping, as if with phosphorus, the summit of every wave that rose, and showing us many strange and mysterious things that seemed to glide in the depths below us.

We were not without hope that this vast light might be seen from some passing ship, and bring her down to our succour; but when day broke fairly, and the poor old Wanderer, after burning to the water's edge, went suddenly down with a sound that passed over

the water like a sigh, an exclamation escaped us all, for as the gray daylight stole over the sea with its usual tropical rapidity, and replaced the ghastly glare on which we had looked so long with haggard eyes, we now swept the far horizon.

Not a sail was in sight, and there we were on the wide and open sea, eight of us in all, cramped in a small boat, with a compass to steer by certainly, but without a sail to hoist, a biscuit to eat, or a drop of water to allay the thirst that, after so many hours of keen excitement, of heat and exertion, was already beginning to be sensibly felt by us all.

For myself, I may say that a dogged indifference to life and death alike possessed me now.

I might die, and never learn the fate of Clarice Haywood. She might survive, the solitary woman on the raft, and never know of mine till we met in that place where there would be no parting, and where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage,

END OF VOL. II.

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